The Persian Letters

MONTESQUIEU

a new translation

edited, translated, and
introduced by J. Robert Loy

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J. ROBERT LOY

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Charles de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, was born in 1689 near Bordeaux. Trained in the law, he withdrew from its practice to devote himself to study and writing. Montesquieu's lasting fame as a political philosopher and man of letters is largely owing to two books, THE PERSIAN LETTERS *and* THE SPIRIT OF THE LAWS, *both of which had a profound effect on thought in Europe and America. Montesquieu died in 1755.*

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INTRODUCTION

It will be seen that egotism—I mean sincere *egotism—is a way of portraying the human heart, toward the comprehension of which we have made gigantic strides since 1721, the date of* The Persian Letters *written by that great man whom I have studied so much —Montesquieu.*

—STENDHAL

In 1715, Louis XIV, Louis the Great, Louis the Sun King, departed this world, presumably for a better one, where with the help of his religious advisers, he had been preparing himself a place during the last years of his reign. Few monarchs have enjoyed such a long one; from 1660 to 1715 "he had caused much talk" and imposed the importance of France on all of Europe. "On his death, everyone grew silent," and in the streets of Paris, we are told, there was general rejoicing. He left behind him a great-grandson, five years old, a realm much weakened by military and financial defeats, and a citizenry more and more drawn to critical analysis of the status quo, although too long spared any semblance of responsibility to translate criticism into action.

In 1715, Charles de Secondat was twenty-six years old. He had been confirmed as *conseiller* in the Bordeaux *parlement* the year before, took a Protestant wife the year of the King's death, and in the next year was to inherit from his uncle the presidency of the Bordeaux *parlement,* along with estates and the title he was to make famous: Baron de Montesquieu. During the years that followed, he continued to manifest his broad interests and constant curiosity in essays and short papers on such varied subjects as Roman politics, religion, the phenomenon of echo, and the function of the kidneys: there was little room for worry about a split between science and the humanities in the eighteenth century. Also during those years, Montesquieu took time out from his official duties, "avenging" himself on their tyranny, to write a series of letters—begun at some uncertain moment and published anonymously in 1721—reflecting the times. Mindful of contemporary literary tastes, he called his recreation *The Persian Letters.*

Persia has relatively little to do with these letters; the regency that followed upon Louis XIV's death has much to do with them; the intellectual climate of subsequent years has very much to do with them. Few moments of French history have combined political, moral, and economic confusion to the same degree as those years between 1715 and the publication of *The Persian Letters.* And yet, Paul Valéry, in a perceptive article on the *Letters* (*Variété,* II, pp. 53-75) can reduce his comments almost entirely to an analysis of the Regency as one of the rare moments for literature when a whole civilization

is in the throes of disintegration. In his usual succinct manner, he evokes the period in which he supposes any happy man would prefer to have lived:

> Europe was then the best of all possible worlds; authority and ease shared a happy existence, truth still kept a certain measure; matter and energy did not govern directly—they did not yet rule. Science was still beautiful and the arts, delicate; there were remains of religion. There was enough of whimsy along with a sufficiency of rigor. . . . Even people in the street had manners.

To attempt a serious historical analysis of the period is beyond a translator's function. It seems clear, however, that the Regency marked a crisis in French, and therefore, in European civilization. In these years of transition, beneath the deceptive ease of existence and laxity of morals, several major questions are being formulated, questions the remainder of the French eighteenth century will set about to solve. We are still solving them.

Despite the exceptions and indicative undertones scholars are justified in uncovering, the age of Louis XIV represents one of those rare moments marked by the orderly synthesis of all aspects of human society. Philosophically, despite Gassendi, Cyrano de Bergerac, Pierre Bayle, and others, it is the age of Descartes. Rational man needs only to follow the good method of reducing any matter under consideration to its smallest component parts. God alone is perfect, but he at least *is* and is perfect and has ordained an orderly creation in which man, if he uses his God-given reason and controls his imperfect passions, can eventually solve almost any question that arises. Far from being limited to the solution of conic sections, the system could pretend to justify a particular organization of social existence. The ideal of the *honnête homme*, which made possible the social order of the age of Louis (and continues, in name, into the eighteenth century) is nothing if not Cartesian. This ideal, variously defined, and suggested only with difficulty to later generations, revolves about the notion of a certain sense of proportion in the affairs of men, in keeping somehow with a pre-established order and proportion in God's creation. Man's most reasonable achievement (as Montaigne had pointed out at

the end of the sixteenth century) was to live gracefully in society, knowing which questions to ask, which activities to pursue, and how far. Built as the Cartesian system was on a universal doubt, there were still certain doubts, certain activities, certain questions that it was not *honnête* to pursue. The strength of Louis XIV's personality and example was, for over a half century, always there to regulate such a system, working from the top down. After 1715, that safety governor, already beginning to waver in the last years, was removed. The proper province of doubt extends to infinity, and with the extension comes a concomitant general feeling of insecurity. During the first third of the eighteenth century, the names Locke and then Newton impose themselves more and more, even on Cartesian France.

As Pascal had seen all too well, Descartes's God was a mere granter of momentum to the universe, a logical necessity to a system that afterward required little of him. He was, of course, a Roman Catholic God, or preferably so, as the Protestants were to discover when the system showed unmistakable signs of cracking and perpetrated the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. As the free examination of the *honnête homme* transcends the cursory acceptance of that God as first mover, there is apt to be discussion, limitation, and disagreement. The regency of Philippe d'Orléans, lacking a political and personal symbol like Louis XIV, facilitated discussion of the nature of the divinity which had, perforce, been clandestine and limited under the old regime.

If the lack of political control could permit discussion of the divinity, then ironically, and in a somewhat circular fashion, it followed that the very political power that was now lacking, and which had heretofore drawn its support as the vicarage of God on earth, should come under closer scrutiny. For later generations, who have the fact of democracy all about them, who have been learning from new sources and materials, more and more about primitive civilizations and about the breakup of the Roman Empire, it must be difficult to understand how monarchy could have been such a natural presumption to citizens of the Regency, including Montesquieu. If, at first, the critical mind will cast about to find justification other

than divine right for the monarchy, it cannot be long before the objective consideration of man and history will make logically and historically valid, if not immediately preferable, systems of government other than the benevolent despotism of monarchs. These will be systems in which the desires and aspirations of whole populations are taken into account. The weakness and foibles of the Regency elite—Orléan's appeal to the *Parlement*, not the nobles, for affirmation of his authority; the scandalous personal lives and shameless avarice of the great; the fiasco of the *affaire* Law—only encouraged speculation as to the sanctity of the monarchy.

In another turn of the circle—God, Catholic God, King by Divine Right—although which arc comes first remains unclear, the earthly organization of the True Church is subjected to the same critical scrutiny. On every score, it will be found more and more wanting. The continuing struggle between Jansenist and Jesuit gives the clearest picture of the crisis within the Church. The trickle, then stream, and then flood of pamphlets, satires, and literary works following *The Persian Letters*, accompanied by the sometimes frantic counterings of Catholic writers and apologists, give ample manifestation of the struggle of the Church with the outside world.

Thus the Regency under its philosophical, political, religious, and social aspects, form the actual Persia, or at least one of the Persias of the *Letters*. But Montesquieu did, after all, call his work *The Persian Letters*, and a few words need to be said about the real, geographical Persia. Ample research has been done tracing Montesquieu's sources and the influences on his work. Although somewhat academic, such information is valuable to the general reader. Suffice it to say that Montesquieu was serious enough about his masquerade to do as much research as he could. He knew the *Voyages en Perse et aux Indes orientales* of the French traveler Jean Chardin, published first in 1686 (a later edition, in 1711, was near a probable genesis of the *Letters*), which reinforced the vogue of Orientalism in France; he knew Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's earlier work, *Six voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes* (1676), as well as François Bernier's *Voyages* (1699); and he borrowed copiously from them—from

Chardin perhaps more for firsthand knowledge of harem life, from Tavernier for geography.[1] The Galland translation (1704–17) of *The Thousand and One Nights* provided him with a stylistic flavor as did, very probably, the works of the father-son Orientalists, François and Alexander Pétis de la Croix, of whom he speaks. He was certainly not unaware of the fashion of real and make-believe voyages; their history can be traced far into the preceding century. In particular he probably knew all the fictions in: *Amusements sérieux et comiques* of Dufresny, in which a Siamese visits Paris; a sketch by Addison in *The Spectator* (1711, translated into French, 1714) giving random notes left behind by four Indian visitors to London; J. F. Bernard's *Réflexions morales, satiriques et comiques sur les moeurs de notre siècle;* and especially, the correspondence supposed to have been written by a Turkish spy in Paris and "translated" by Giovanni Paolo Marana (Paris, 1684) under the French title *L'Espion du Grand Seigneur et les relations secrètes envoyées au Divan de Constantinople.*[2] It is by now generally agreed that the work of Marana had the most important direct influence (see A. Crisafulli, *"L'observateur oriental avant les Lettres persanes"*). Thus, both from the point of view of factual information and from that of literary invention, Montesquieu borrowed frankly and intelligently. The more revealing observation to be made is that his *Persian*

[1] Although Montesquieu probably borrowed most heavily from Chardin and Tavernier, other sources were not lacking. Here is a partial list: Struys, *Voyages;* Olearius, *Voyage en Moscovie, Tartarie, et Perse* (1659); Thevenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant* (1663); Herbert, *Relation du voyage de Perse et des Indes orientales* (trans. from Flemish, 1673); Rycaut, *Histoire de l'état présent de l'Empire ottoman* (trans. from English, 1671); Palafox, *Histoire de la conquête de la Chine par les Tartares* (1670); Mme d'Aulnoy, *Relation du voyage d'Espagne* (1715); Tournefort, *Relation d'un voyage du Levant* (1717). Montesquieu certainly knew some of these and probably knew the others.

[2] Marana's book was translated into French, probably with the help of Cotolendi, who added the last volumes of the work. Cotolendi also published (in 1700, in *Saint-Evremoniana*): *"Traduction d'une Lettre italienne écrite par un Sicilien à un de ses amis, contenant une critique agéable de Paris."*

Letters sold so well that they continued and added to the popularity of the genre throughout the century.[3] The influences—in whatever direction they operate—are less important than the fact that Montesquieu is doing two things in the *Letters:* using Persia as a literary blind for a satire on French institutions, and giving information about and drawing social conclusions from the real Persia which are as carefully documented as his sources made possible. The modern reader can forgive Montesquieu for any fictional Persia in the light of the more amusing satire on the French. He must have a double respect for the care with which the author has prepared the subterfuge. But this is hardly surprising in an author who subsequently became an alert traveler through Europe. Greece and Rome, the future author of *The Spirit of the Laws* could visit only in books, but the Europe of his own century, he could and did know (*Voyages, NRF* [see Bibliography], I, pp. 536-972). It is because Montesquieu's fictional Persians are, at once, observers and bona fide travelers with roots still in another, real land that *The Persian Letters* is superior to the many similar literary inventions that preceded it.

For the modern reader, however, it is neither as a historical view of the Regency nor yet as an example of eighteenth-century comment on Persia that *The Persian*

[3] A partial list of books influenced, directly or indirectly, by *The Persian Letters* follows: Saint-Foix, *Lettres d'une Turque à Paris* (1730); Marquis d'Argens, *Lettres chinoises* (1735); J. de la Rue, *Lettres d'un sauvage dépaysé* (1738); *L'Espion turc à Francfort* (1741); Godard d'Aucour, *Mémoires turcs* (1743); *L'Espion chinois en Europe* (1745); Mme de Grafigny, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747); Hugary de Lamarck-Courmont, *Lettres d'Aza ou d'un Péruvien* (1748); *Lettres siamoises* (1751); Maubert de Gouvest, *Lettres iroquoises* (1752), *Lettres chérakésiennes* (1769); Chevalier d'Arcy, *Lettres d'Osman* (1753); Frederick II (?), *Relation de Phihihu, émissaire de l'Empereur de la Chine en Europe* (1760); Mme de Villedieu, *Mémoires du Serail;* Mme de Gomez, *Anecdotes ou histoire de la maison ottomane* and *Anecdotes persanes; Lettres d'Asi à Zurac* (1766); Voltaire, *Lettres d'Amabed* (1769), *L'Ingénu* (1767); *Lettres d'un Indien à Paris* (1788); Lord Lyttleton, *Letters from a Persian in England to His Friend at Ispahan* (1735); William Beckford, *Vathek* (1786-87); José Cadalso, *Cartas Marruecas* (1793).

Letters should, and does, remain an important book. The letters divert and amuse, of course, as they were meant to do, but it is rather for ideas of continuing currency, validity, and development that the work remains a landmark. The obvious alliance of ideas to be made is with Montesquieu's subsequent (more substantial, less literary) works, *Considerations on the Greatness and Decline of the Romans* and the magistral *Spirit of the Laws*. Studies on these matters are not lacking (see Robert Shackleton, "Montesquieu in 1948," for a review of scholarly work accomplished). The notes appended to the present edition point out some of these parallels. But in a more general way, transcending Montesquieu's own later works, there are in *The Persian Letters* three areas of thought which can be discussed with benefit to the general reader. These might conveniently be labeled philosophic ideas, social ideas, and literary ideas.

The letters represent an excursion into comparison and contrast. Like some of his predecessors in the contemporary travel and voyage literature, Montesquieu is convinced that France, and Western civilization in general, must abandon insularity and ill-justified complacency. Difficult as it might be for a *président à mortier*, and a Baron de Montesquieu, the end of absolute values is a fact. Other civilizations, other climes, have produced other solutions for the various aspects of individual and group existence. The proper study, then, is no longer the a priori justification of the status quo but rather the examination of undeniable facts about various individual and social solutions as they have existed and do exist. Thereafter, ideally, one may attempt to arrive at some new and limited statement of absolutes which will remain valid for all of human nature insofar as it can be known. Montesquieu's method, as it has often and rightly been pointed out (Cf. Joseph Dedieu, *Montesquieu*), is singularly divided between frank empiricism and deductive rationalism, for which he has a natural predilection and nostalgia. Yet all of his writings, and particularly *The Spirit of the Laws*, starting from its very title, can be explained only by that division. Montesquieu is not so much interested in making a compendium of world law as he is in finding what impulses in the human being motivate the very concept and necessity of law. That spirit, or guiding principle, may hopefully

constitute a valid abstraction, a tentative "absolute" as it were.[4] Meanwhile, the raw material from which the spirit has been decanted can only reinforce the realization of the relativity and multiplicity of human institutions.

It is in his insistence upon the details necessary to the preparation of a philosophic synthesis that we can see the Montesquieu who has often been called a forefather of the social sciences. In *The Persian Letters* and then in *The Spirit of the Laws*, we find those delightful and instructive particulars—of love, of marriage, of ambition, of social motivation, of friendship, of eccentric mannerism —that in a later age will grow into the more scientific disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and the behavioral sciences in general. Consider Montesquieu's women. He is sometimes confused about the particular seraglio inmate whose personality interests him most; it is now Zachi, now Zelis, now Roxane. The reader finishes the *Letters* with no very clear idea of the character development of its heroines, not sure if this usual novelistic concern was even present in the author's mind as he wrote. Yet Montesquieu presented more than a diverting picture of women as the simple and necessary vessel of men's desires and pleasures, a picture not at all unusual for his

[4] This is the a priori bent or longing toward absolute values which characterizes Montesquieu's double or (as critics have it) contradictory thinking. He would like to keep, or at least to reconcile, the changeless view of human nature with the changing view of historical man. The serious student cannot be unaware of the service Montesquieu, by this very double method, rendered to the development of the social sciences. Excesses of social organization (from overdone statistics to attempted manipulation of minds) are in direct contrast to M's distrust of a human science that would be as subject to natural laws as the material world. As Isaiah Berlin puts it (*Montesquieu*, p. 286): "It is to the eternal credit of Montesquieu that he committed this very crime." The explanation for M's double method lies in the variable notion of those troublesome and yet keynote words of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—reason and nature. Unlike the social planners, M (again in the words of Berlin, p. 285) "hates and fears all despots, even the most rational and enlightened, for he distrusts all central authority, all the great managers of society, all those who confidently and tidily arrange the destinies of others."

period and for many of the novels that were to follow. He is interested in the plight of his Roxanes—not purely as female animals nor yet as classic representatives of feminine virtue, but rather, as both of these. He is aware, that is, of his harem ladies as complete human beings possessing sensual appetites as well as intellectual and moral motivations. His insistence on the lot of the eunuch is more than a pretext for shocking and titillating the gay society of the Regency. The eunuch is more than the literary symbol for decadent virility which Valéry seems to suggest; he is a study in the character of the incomplete man. In much the same fashion, Condillac and Diderot later considered the whole man as the piecemeal addition of the attributes and data of the five senses. In short, by attention to the details of individual human reactions to a given situation, Montesquieu abandons any absolute of human behavior and attempts first to reach some understanding of the multiplicity of possible human solutions to human predicaments. One first knows men in the aggregate,[5] then one attempts to generalize, if possible, on human needs and human aspirations. This frame of mind clearly lies behind Montesquieu's later distillation of human laws (in the *Spirit*) and provides the motivating force for all the attempts to recapture the primary facts about "natural" man which characterize the rest of the century up to and after Rousseau.

The social and philosophic ideas of *The Persian Letters* have been treated many times; the book is immediately susceptible to an analysis of idea content. The literary value of the *Letters* has perhaps received less consideration. The book has been many times, and rightly, claimed as literature, but always in that peculiar manner of afterthought so often applied to all eighteenth-century French writing. It is a stereotype of non-French readers to pass off the century as rich in ideas and then to pose the inevitable question, Can ideas be literature?[6] This is pre-

[5] In the *Pensées* (*NRF*, I, p. 1228) M says: "An honorable man (*honnête homme*) who writes *Characters* like La Bruyère should always make scenes and not portraits; paint men and not a man."

[6] See Norman L. Torrey, "Is There Any Eighteenth-century Literature?" in *French Review*, May 1959. I cannot agree with Albert Sorel (*Montesquieu*, p. 34, Eng. ed.) when he says that

cisely what interests us here, just as it eventually interested Montesquieu.

Happily, Montesquieu has left, in the letters themselves, more than one hint as to the approach most likely to enlighten the reader on the literary aspects of the work—or rather, on the literary aspects of the work as Montesquieu saw them from within the eighteenth century. The following pages are shamelessly old-fashioned and historical in their approach to literature. Montesquieu himself was unable to speak of his early work except in a historical setting; his comments, written at a later date, bear the cachet of surprise of the man who has only later realized what he managed to write some thirty years earlier. Two things are immediately clear: Montesquieu was not impressed by the current novel as a literary form (Letter CXXXVII);[7] he seems delighted that readers found in the *Letters*, "without expecting to, a kind of novel" ("Some Reflections on *The Persian Letters*"). If we can somehow square these seemingly divergent feelings of the author, we will be well on our way to a better grasp of the literary role of the work.

Seventeenth-century French literature was well known to Montesquieu. He was not, as too many suspect, completely lost in readings on philosophy, history, and law. The categories of that literature, in order of importance, might be given as theater, maxims, and fiction. Theater, with Corneille, Racine, Molière, and lesser lights, dominates the scene. That very special kind of literature—so French and so characteristic of the *salons*—the pithy truism, or maxim, is represented best by La Fontaine in poetry and by La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld in prose. As a kind of tolerated outsider, there is the novel: pastoral

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the Persian details and story element constitute "the most questionable part of his book."

[7] F. C. Green, in "Montesquieu the Novelist and Some Imitations of the Lettres persanes," says that these remarks do not refer to true representatives of the genre. M shows (*Pensées, NRF*, I, p. 1540, #2066) his deliberate confusion between prose and poetry as distinct genres when he remarks: "The four great poets: Plato, Father Malebranche, Milord Shaftesbury, and Montaigne." It was clearly the insipid stuff of the typical romance or novel as he knew it that he rejected, not the potential literary value of a work in prose.

and repetitious at the outset of the century, picaresque, realistic, and burlesque in reaction during the middle years, and finally, psychological and derivative of tragedy in works like Mme de Lafayette's *Princesse de Clèves.* The many memoirs and pseudo memoirs written during the century were scarcely taken by contemporaries to be novels. On the contrary, they were popular precisely because they pretended to be true, and the memoir may be considered a fourth important genre.

Montesquieu has, of course, not written theater, but in many ways, *The Persian Letters* fuse the other literary genres into something new, which even he seems surprised to realize has been taken as "a kind of novel." Consciously or unconsciously, Montesquieu used as ingredients in the letters: the maxim, or character portrait, familiar to antiquity and to French classicism (satire, as it were, in prose); the relation of anecdotes about known personalities which is the soul of the memoir; and borrowing from novelists other than Mme de Lafayette, the exposition of obviously fictional characters tied loosely together by a sort of plot. And yet *The Persian Letters* does not properly fit into any one literary genre. There is no universal character; there are only characters observed by foreigners who never pretend that their behavior is universal. The element of memoir is more incidental than basic. There is not the usual loose extravagance with which the novels of the time awaited the consummation of love (even though, in the manner of Cervantes, there are three "hors d'oeuvre").

Montesquieu describes the kind of novel he thinks he wrote in "Some Reflections on *The Persian Letters.*" First, there is a plot, which holds the characters together. Then, because at the very moment of their presumed writing, the characters are caught up in a set of present circumstances, their passions are all the more real to the reader; in other words, this is not a historical novel in which an omniscient third person, the author, is retelling events after the fact. In the third paragraph, Montesquieu is very clear. He has written an epistolary novel, which to his way of thinking has allowed him to mix rationalization, or philosophy, and a story containing the emotions and passions of its characters. The plot has not, he says, been precast in his mind, and the whole agglomeration of elements seems free to move where it will although

actually following a secret line of organization left obscure by the author. In another place in his writings (*NRF*, I, p. 1245), Montesquieu reduces this third paragraph to the sole importance of the epistolary form: "My *Persian Letters* taught how to write novels in letter form." We must not underestimate Montesquieu's perception in singling out that form. But there is more than this behind the third paragraph, more perhaps than Montesquieu, with his attention shifted to a work of another nature, was aware of.

Montesquieu's realization that the epistolary novel could break the stereotype of the typical romance, could mix philosophy, politics, and ethics *as well as* plot line (although not seemingly preplotted) *and* the characters' passions caught in the quick, suggests a veiled awareness of a later accepted notion of the novel. The surprise of Montesquieu's Persians at seeing a new world replaces the too obvious magic and the extravagant element of past romances and yet provides the interest or amusement a reader looks for in the novel. In *The Persian Letters* the amusement is dependent, in part, on the satire of familiar things and places. The description of human feelings as they are being felt *in medias res* is the novelist's tribute to the sensationalists and the emotions—a tribute that looms large in the rest of the century. The random talk about philosophy, ethics, and politics is the seemingly accidental intrusion of the complication of contemporary life and is in marked contrast to the stereotyped pattern of the usual romance that insists usually on love, or rather, the gradual conquest of love (a hangover from medieval romance via the Spanish pastoral). And the "secret and . . . obscure chain" of organization imposed by the author is what might be called the moral intent or central myth of the novel. Let it be noted immediately, however, that moral does not mean moralizing and that the novel must remain essentially entertaining.[8] The black overtones of a Dostoevsky or Kafka offer an immediate contrast to the gayer eighteenth-century conception of the novel. One of the few other comments Montesquieu later made about the *Letters* (*NRF*, I, p. 1244) was in-

[8] See M's views on the limits of passion in the novel (*Pensées*, *NRF*, I, p. 998): "But that passions should be stirred, this is the role of poetry."

sistent on this point: "I venture to say that *The Persian Letters* was laughing and gay, and for that reason, was popular."

If we try to isolate the "secret and . . . obscure chain" or moral myth, around which the novel is organized (and Montesquieu seems to have encouraged such conjecture), we are immediately assailed by a crowd of ideas that at first glance seem to lack any unified organization. There is much obvious description of stock human passions straight out of seventeenth-century maxims—love, jealousy, ambition, pride, social artifice. Yet we soon become aware that these passions, individualized as they are, cannot constitute the chain of the novel. We also comprehend better a statement Montesquieu made elsewhere (*NRF*, I, p. 1308) analyzing pure reason into "moral reason" and "physical reason." The latter suggests emotion and passion. Indeed as the author—who approved of *Manon*, despite the conduct of its heroine, because "love is a noble motive" (*NRF*, II, p. 1374)—says in still another place (*NRF*, I, p. 1225), we must ridicule not passions but the manner in which they are handled, for "passions are not in themselves ridiculous." Our notion of the comic, he says, suffers precisely because we try to seek out the ridiculous side of passions rather than of manners.

Perhaps, then, the work is to be taken as a novel of manners. No reader of *The Persian Letters* could overlook the important role played by women. Is Montesquieu to be taken for a feminist? Are we to weep over the fate of the harem ladies? Hardly, with an author who admits (in a bad moment, probably) that "women are a very ridiculous sex" (*NRF*, I, p. 1311). But understanding and sympathy, we should have, and an objective (when possible) view of the whole changing phenomenon "woman." For if Montesquieu's Roman scholarship and his knowledge of past European literature made him conscious of the undoubted existence of a myth or ideal of womanhood, he now poses the question (and the wealth of specific detail of the Persian harem need not confuse us), What will happen when the ideal becomes the actual and when women, who were obedient while restricted by traditional literary convention or harem walls, become free? Does the whole social organization collapse (as it seems to be doing in Usbek's seraglio)? Do we therefore float

toward a kind of social and moral nihilism? Or perhaps a reversal and confusion of the sexes? [9]

Again in the "Reflections," in what seems a routine justification and excuse for touching upon religious problems, Montesquieu has given the key to his "obscure chain." "The reader," he says, "is asked to be aware that the whole delight of the book consisted in the eternal contrast between real things and the unusual, new, or strange ways in which those things are perceived." This is not only the delight of the book, but its organization as well.

In Letter XVII, Montesquieu plays with the idea (or prejudice) we have about a certain "real thing"—in this case, unclean meat. "It seems to me that objects in themselves are neither pure nor impure. . . . Mud appears dirty to us only because it wounds our vision or some other of our senses." It should not come as a surprise in the author of the *Spirit* that the first part of the central idea of the *Letters* is an obvious one: that all things, including "reality" itself, are subjective and relative—relative to time, to place, to climate, to religious belief, to racial and national prejudice, to intelligence. Following close upon this realization comes the necessary correlate: that sanity and civilization lie in accepting that relativity.

Such a unifying idea of *The Persian Letters* has certain elements in common with long-established scholarly views

[9] An interesting random thought appears in M's *Pensées* (*NRF*, I, p. 1234): "I was asked why there was no more taste for the works of Corneille, Racine, etc. I replied: 'Because everything that demands wit has become ridiculous. The evil is more general. We can no longer tolerate anything with a definite object: military men can no longer stand war; scholarly people can no longer stand the study; and the same with other things. We are nowadays only concerned with general objects, and in actuality, that reduces to nothing. It is the society of women which has brought us to this point, for it is their character to be attached to nothing permanent. There is only one sex any more, and in mind we are all women. If one night we were all to change in physiognomy, no one would even notice there had been a change. Even were women to take over all the positions offered by society, and even were men to be deprived of all the positions society can take away, neither sex would be troubled or upset.' "

of Montesquieu's thinking in general. Gustave Lanson called the unifying principle of Montesquieu's work "historical determinism." Gilbert Chinard, in a careful article (taking the lukewarm reception of Montesquieu's *Spirit* by the *philosophes* as a point of departure) called it "historical pessimism." There can be no doubt that *The Persian Letters* represents much serious spadework, in source readings and in reflection, for Montesquieu's eventual philosophy of social man. Yet the terms determinism and pessimism seem somehow too grave for a work written at and about a period when everyone was young—irresponsible and perhaps reprehensible, but young.

"How can anyone be a Persian?" Montesquieu has a Parisian fop ask. And Valéry is right to take up the question and transform it into another, which involves Montesquieu's central myth: "How can anyone be himself?" That question, or one similar to it, is the "obscure chain" around which is organized the slim plot of two Persians in search of knowledge of the world. Much of the material involving Usbek and Rica is really autobiographical, involving Montesquieu. (See P. Barrière, "*Eléments bordelais. . . .*") Such subjectivity is directly implied in Usbek's and Montesquieu's first step to wisdom. Montesquieu admits that he is like the classic traveler—the traveler whose thoughts upon watching strange countryside slide past, turn about questions like: What are all these people doing here? How can anyone live here? The first shock, then, is the realization of the tenuousness, the miracle of any social order. There are many travelers who will never get over that shock; in the *Letters*, Usbek requires much more time to get over it than Rica. Manifestly, some will never get over it and will react in one of two ways. Either they will retreat into a provincial shell of comforting traditional values, or they will remain precariously unattached, rootless, and withdrawn from all social reality because the initial shock of its relativity has swept the ground from under their feet.

What Montesquieu begins to glimpse here in terms of the novel is the possibility of a loosely organized genre in which the very precariousness of personal identity and social existence can be suggested in many different ways—by mixing philosophy, politics, and ethics, by portraying

various finely drawn types, by showing the immediate (thus his predilection for the epistolary form) reaction of a given character to a given encounter at the very time it is happening, by piling up details with no obvious thesis or frame on which to place them. In a sense, "How can anyone be himself?" is answered by continuing to observe everyone being himself. There is no withdrawal in Montesquieu, and there is no reactionary retreat to familiar attitudes, however much such a step may have tempted the Baron de Montesquieu as he beheld with distaste and misgiving many of the details of Regency life. On the contrary, the realization of multiplicity in human attitudes only encouraged his study of human institutions.

The Persian Letters seems to have been written for that person (that is, each of us) who, shocked by the new and unusual ways of seeing what he took to be old, reliable reality, cries out painfully: "What! Is nothing sacred?" Montesquieu, as he views the excesses of the Regency, is not unfamiliar with that cry. His not too reassuring answer is simply that nothing is sacred, or at least, not as much as we assumed to be. The next query —something like, "What are we, then, to do?"—is answered quite simply by his Persian's example, and by Montesquieu's own example. We live in the midst of the confusion, and we enjoy it. Then, if possible, we try to adapt to it and to accept it provisorily while we seek ways and means to extract from it a new synthesis, one that will respond to an inner principle or reality of the society, the time, and the place. Rome fell, says Montesquieu, because the Romans deserted their "inner principle." In any case, like the seasoned traveler in a foreign country, we must realize that social order is ever in the process of being remade, always a short distance from anarchy.

The episode of the Troglodytes (Letters XI-XV) is instructive. Social existence is cyclical and never constant. If Montesquieu at first thought natural virtue (contrary to Hobbes's state of war) was the regulator of social order, he later realized that in other positions along the cycle, a more sophisticated and artificial form of virtue—honor—must take over the job of regulating. Eventually,

in the *Spirit,* he developed changeable principles and ideals for the various positions through which social existence evolves. The literature of the preceding century was, as Montesquieu points out in his notes on literature (*NRF,* I, p. 1225), a reflection and analysis of a particular, long-established stability; as such, it fell into classical, established genres. The main types of human nature had already been portrayed, and writers came too late to improve on them. Literary subjects now had to be finer, subtler, that is to say, reconsidered under the unsettling light of a society in transition. Thirty years after the publication of *The Persian Letters,* Montesquieu discovered that the "kind of novel" it represented is the ideal genre for comprehending the complexity of a society in the process of change. During a certain time, the epistolary form of novel continued in vogue, then it gave way before new forms dictated by other techniques. But the novel itself continued to be the genre of a society in transition. And the novel, because of Montesquieu's own experience with the public effect of *The Persian Letters* —and not because of any deductive thinking applied to the genre—became for Montesquieu that literary work in prose which, unlike existing examples called novels or romances, could discuss ideas in an entertaining form and against a familiar background.

It might be called the nonprofessional's access to ideas, everyman's pastime, the burgher's recognition of reality as it seems to be—it remains something neither the Schoolmen nor classical tragedy nor pastoral artifice had been. Montesquieu never says as much, but such a realization is at the heart of his apparent satisfaction that he has written "a kind of novel" and has still managed to express ideas important to a society in search of itself. *The Persian Letters* is not yet a novel, but in the very reaction of its author, it points the way to the novel and to the literary form that has served the Western world for the past two centuries—while epic and tragedy and poetry lay dying—and that only now, if we are to believe the prognosticators, is touching upon its demise.

If this idea of the novel is uncomplicated and as yet imperfect, we should nonetheless not underestimate its importance and influence. Out of such thinking, in literary

terms, will grow the favored eighteenth-century genre, the *conte philosophique,* a flood of epistolary novels, and eventually, the novel as we suppose it ought to be. Out of the ideas of *The Persian Letters* directly will come the more mature and more guarded *Spirit of the Laws,* as well as the eventual dimension of the *philosophes'* vision, and their *Encyclopédie.* It is not too much to say that if the French scholar, Lanson, can call Voltaire's *Lettres anglaises ou philosophiques* the first bomb hurled against the old regime, then *The Persian Letters* is the first volley of musket fire, or at least, the fuse of that later bomb. Valéry does not exaggerate when he says: "This book is unbelievably daring." Rare would be the modern work that dared to deal with contemporary society as frankly as Montesquieu deals with Regency France. Still more rare would be the book that attempted to do so and managed at the same time to remain witty and light. Yet, in many ways, the Regency is to traditional France what the present day is to traditional American values. Out of such daring will come a good many of the properly termed advancements of scientific and social thought.

The whole picture now fits together. If we originally chose to discuss *The Persian Letters* in its philosophic, social, and literary aspects, it is clear that the single idea of the relativity of reality and the accompanying acceptance of a universal indeterminateness ties all of these aspects together. Even so, Montesquieu would have found eminently true Ernst Troeltsch's phrase: "the Absolute is in the relative, though not finally and fully in it." No reader should suppose that such a frame of mind remains constantly optimistic. Indeed, the contrary is true in Montesquieu, and causes some of his more zealously optimistic *philosophe* friends to view him with suspicion.

It is perhaps literarily that the central theme of *The Persian Letters* is clearest. The book talks about many things, but it talks a good deal about women and eunuchs. Montesquieu comes close to pinpointing the creative motif of the novel in a later reflection (*NRF,* I, p. 1308): "It seems that timidity is joined to avarice; thus, old men, eunuchs, women—all this comes from a weakness of soul." Here the timeless and the historic aspects of the *Letters* merge into one. If ever there was a moment of

timidity, weakness, and avarice, it was the Regency, and that is precisely why Montesquieu wrote a fiction to satirize it. Yet there is the clear suggestion that such a state of affairs is a recurring and universal moment in the lives of men. When the central symbol or myth of a civilization can no longer be accepted as its "inner principle," and when nothing has been done to provide it with a new myth closer to its reality, then that civilization is in grave danger. A strong, firmly established peak of French civilization had just disappeared, shaken by the weakening of its stabilizing myth. Montesquieu himself, almost against his objective judgment, continued to hold on to one aspect of an orderly moment: he remained a monarchist. But as for scientific inquiry, both pure and social, he saw the implications writ large.

As for literature, he saw (in a discussion of tragedy) that new circumstances, customs, and language must come to renew it (*NRF*, I, p. 1225). If the sole realization of relativity remains constant, then in all human affairs—arts and sciences, politics, social organization, religion—new myths or newly accepted social ideals must appear to stabilize and create, if only for a moment of history, before, as with the Troglodytes, a new cycle begins. *The Persian Letters* is an eminently transitional book, whether in terms of the Regency or in terms of every recurrent crisis in human affairs. Perhaps Valéry is right—for Montesquieu is contradictory on the matter—in saying that it is the period of transition and incipient decadence, and not the period of stability, that gives rise to rich literature, bathed in the illumination of the end. "The end—always sumptuous and voluptuous—of a political edifice is celebrated by an illumination in which everything people were afraid to use up before is spent" (*Variété*, II).

For all this talk of crisis and transition, we must not forget the basic ingredient of gaiety that Montesquieu saw in his book, a gaiety of acceptance of the times "when the world was young." That he was a younger man when he wrote it does not blind the older scholar to appreciating the virtue of that gaiety. Conversely, we must not assume that because it was a young man's book, the possibility of serious thinking at its center is precluded. As Montesquieu said in another context, and as remains

true for all literature, all is in the manner. And the manner of *The Persian Letters* is gay and amusing[10] in the best tradition of the century of Watteau, Fragonard, and Marivaux. This does not exclude a certain foreboding momentarily glimpsed, but it most certainly excludes moral preachment and prudish sensibility.[11]

On that score much more could be said. But it is perhaps long past time to heed the author's own warning and let the reader get on to the *Letters* in his own way. "Translation," said Montesquieu, "is a difficult thing; you must first know Latin, then forget it." Let us hope the French has been properly forgotten in the following pages. But there are other pitfalls. "Tradition," said Montesquieu, "has always permitted the translator—even the most barbarous commentator—to decorate the beginning of his adaptation . . . with a panegyric of the original and there point out the importance, value, and excellence of it" (Preface). May I be forgiven by both the author and the reader if I have abused that tradition. However that may be, the barbarous commentator stops here "and my good reasons for . . . doing so can be surmised" in the words of Montesquieu: "One of the best reasons is that it would be a very boring business, coming as it does in a place already very boring in itself." I mean an introduction.

J. ROBERT LOY

[10] The word "witty" is a frequent word in M's vocabulary, to the point where he was accused of having written *Wit about Laws* rather than *Spirit of Laws* (a pun on the French *esprit*). Some of the stylistic devices that produce the wit of the *Letters* (anaphora, hyperbole, irony, antithesis) have been studied by Pierre Nardin in *"La Recette stylistique des Lettres persanes."*

[11] M in his *Pensées* (*NRF*, I, p. 998, #89), says: "No doubt the reading of novels is a dangerous thing. But what isn't? Would to God we had to reform only the ill effects of reading novels! But to order a being who is always sensitive not to have feelings, to seek to banish passions without allowing them to be rectified, to propose perfection to a century which grows daily worse, to rebel against human weakness amidst so many examples of wickedness. . . . I am very much afraid that such a high-flung morality will become purely speculative, and that in trying to show us completely what we ought to be, the moralists will end by leaving us as we are."

NOTE ON EDITIONS

It will probably never be known exactly when Montesquieu started work on *The Persian Letters.* It is all the more unlikely that we shall ever know at what moment the idea for the work came into his mind. It has been usual to assume that the idea came to him and that work started on the letters sometime after 1711 and before 1713. This conjecture is based upon information revealed by the Abbé de Guasco, a friend of the author, to the effect that the young Montesquieu had sought relief from paternally imposed concentration on law studies by imagining his Rica and Usbek. Montesquieu's father died in 1713. However, as has been pointed out, this dating is not without difficulties, of which the most embarrassing is that Guasco was a friend of later vintage and had certainly not known Montesquieu's father. There is even, as Antoine Adam suggests, much to be said for the suspicion that the mature author of *The Spirit of the Laws* would very probably have liked to pass off the earlier work as a concoction of relatively irresponsible youth and was, therefore, silent on the question of its genesis, allowing Guasco to say what he liked. It is true that the 1711 edition of Chardin furnished Montesquieu with much of the background he used; it is also true (as A. Masson relates) that in 1712 or 1713 Montesquieu had met a Chinese traveler by the name of Ouange or Hoange and that reflections of their conversation can be found in the letters. But on the other hand, the Chardin Montesquieu owned was purchased in 1720 (he could, of course, have read it before) and the *Espion turc* of Marana was owned by Montesquieu in a 1717 edition.

For many good reasons, 1717 would seem to be the probable early date for the writing of the first letters. Those reasons are very clearly presented in an article by Robert Shackleton, "The Moslem Calendar. . . ." There is much to be said (see P. Janet, "*Comparaison . . .*") for the hypothesis that much of the first eight or ten books of the *Spirit* was organized in Montesquieu's thinking and possibly written in more or less the same period as the *Letters*; that there is a difference of approach to the problem and of general flavor of expression between those early chapters and the rest of the later work has been obvious to many critical readers. The more subtle problem of the genesis of the idea in Montesquieu's mind remains insoluble, although it is very likely that the idea

dates from a period earlier than that of the actual writing, probably about 1713.

The first edition of the *Letters* appeared in two volumes in 1721, without name of author. The edition was marked "Pierre Marteau at Cologne" but was, in effect, printed by Jacques Desbordes in Amsterdam—a favorite ruse of the eighteenth century in France. There were at least ten printings of this edition. It contained one hundred and fifty letters.

The second edition, with perceptible changes, is usually dated 1722, although Adam points out that the Arsenal Library in Paris has a copy of this edition dated 1721. The long-discussed (starting with Voltaire) possibility that this edition was trumped-up, at a date later than the 1722(1721) appearing on it, in order to assuage the tender sensibilities of important voters on Montesquieu's election to the French Academy (1727-1728), is by now completely discredited by scholars. Indeed, Adam proposes several good, although not conclusive, reasons to show that this edition may have been an earlier draft of the *Letters* which slipped past the kind of surveillance Montesquieu was later to show. The edition contained one hundred forty letters of which three were new. Thirteen of the original edition had been excluded.

The third edition is dated 1754; again the publisher was Pierre Marteau of Cologne. The edition was authorized by Montesquieu, and for it he wrote "Some Reflections on *The Persian Letters*," in an attempt to soften some of the daring of the first editions of his youthful work. It contained the original one hundred fifty letters of the first edition and, in a supplement, the three new letters of the second edition and eight heretofore unknown letters: thus one hundred sixty-one letters.

The fourth edition appeared in 1758 (three years after Montesquieu's death), edited by a lawyer friend, Richer, as part of a *Complete Works*. This edition followed what must have been Montesquieu's last desires as to the *Letters* —desires he made known in two notebooks (since found at his chateau, La Brède, and published). The first notebook is marked "Corrections to *The Persian Letters* made on the first edition" and was finished in 1754. The second notebook is marked "Corrections to *The Persian Letters*. Last copy" and must fall between 1754 and the author's

death in 1755. In this last notebook, Montesquieu's intention is to consolidate all the letters, including those that in 1754 had appeared in the supplement, and he there decided upon their respective order in a final edition. The 1758 edition had one hundred sixty-one letters (all in the main body—no supplement), and although Montesquieu had forgotten to include Letter CXLV in his final notebook list, it seems likely (despite the contrary feelings of the important Montesquieu scholar Henri Barckhausen, who excluded it from his edition of 1897) that he meant to include it.

Later, Barckhausen found at La Brède "Fragments of old material for *The Persian Letters*" and published this material (six letters and four fragments) in his edition of Montesquieu's *Pensées* in 1899. Still later, Barckhausen found two more letters and three fragments and published them in his edition of the *Letters* in 1913.

Within the last years, André Masson printed an unedited letter (of which a part, in earlier draft, had already appeared in the *Pensées*) in 1954 (*Mercure de France*, June), and Antoine Adam (in his critical edition of the *Letters*, 1954) reprints a fragment of the *Pensées* which he justifies as really intended by Montesquieu for *The Persian Letters*.

Thus the material available for translation makes clear what Montesquieu planned as the definitive edition. It is not very likely that other letters or fragments of letters will come to light; they would in any case remain fragments and supplementary letters not chosen by Montesquieu for a final edition. And yet, in dealing with the eighteenth century, it is wise to say "not very likely." For Montesquieu himself had noted (in "Fragments of old material for *The Persian Letters*") that there had been others which he had "thrown away or put elsewhere," and in his original preface to the first edition (p. 43) he had said: "I have a great number of others in my portfolio which I can give to the public hereafter." Latapie, Montesquieu's former secretary, said in 1795 that there was another collection of papers at La Brède containing some forty letters. They have never been found. Thus, although it is not very likely that other letters will turn up (since La Brède has been successively searched), we should be wise not to show too much surprise were other

fragments or letters to appear. If they should, it is my gratuitous conjecture that they will turn out to be materials from which Montesquieu had already gleaned the parts he wanted to use; for his working habit, we now know, was to keep a reserve among his literary baggage and to skim the best off the reserve as he needed it. Thus any new material, although unedited as such, would tend to duplicate ideas already used in the *Letters* and would very probably constitute padding for the harem episodes of the story, for it is difficult to believe that Montesquieu would have kept back any "idea" letters.

For the translation, I have used a composite of the texts of Henri Barckhausen (1897, 1913), Elie Carcassonne (1929), Roger Caillois (1949), and Antoine Adam (1954), with perhaps greater attention to Carcassonne, and naturally, Adam. The letters proper number one hundred sixty-one; all known additional material appears in the Appendix. In the Textual Notes I have shown the important variants among the several eighteenth-century editions—1721, 1722(1721), 1754, and 1758—as well as an additional edition that must be taken into account, the edition compiled by Barckhausen after study of Montesquieu's notebooks at La Brède. Where later editions have disagreed on readings, I have tried to note such disagreement in the same Textual Notes.

J. R. L.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON *The Persian Letters* (1754)[1]*

Nothing in *The Persian Letters* pleased readers more than to find* in the book, without expecting to, a kind of novel. The reader can see its beginning, its development, and end. Its several characters are positioned along a chain linking them together. As they extend their visit over Europe, the customs of this part of the world assume a less marvelous and fantastic quality in their minds, and depending upon the differences of their characters, they are either more or less struck by such marvelous and fantastic elements as remain. On the other hand, disorder grows apace in the Asian harem in direct proportion to the prolonged absence of Usbek, which is to say, in proportion to the increase of frenzy and the decrease of love in that seraglio.[2]

Moreover, such novels succeed as a rule because the people themselves become aware of their present circumstances, and this makes the passions involved more sensible to the reader than all the third-person reports one could write on the subject. This consideration is one of the reasons for the success* of several charming works[3] that have appeared since the publication of *The Persian Letters.*

Finally, in most novels, digressions are to be sanctioned only when they form in themselves a new novel. A writer would not think of mixing discursive reasoning into his novel, for since none of the characters have been brought together to reason, such a procedure would shock the intent and nature of the work. But in the form of letters, where the actors* are not chosen and where subjects treated do not depend upon any intent or plan already cast in his mind, the author has granted himself the prerogative of being able to mix philosophy, politics, and ethics into a novel and to bind the whole together by a secret and, so to speak, obscure chain.

The Persian Letters at first enjoyed such a prodigious sale that the publishers* did all they could to procure sequels. They went about tugging at the sleeves of everyone they met, saying: "Sir, I beg of you, make me some more *Persian Letters.*"

But what I have just said above is enough to make clear that the letters lend themselves to no sequel, even less so to an admixture of letters written by another hand, however ingenious they may be.[4]

There are* some aspects that many people found too

bold; those people are advised to be more attentive to the nature of the work. The Persians, destined to play such an important role in the novel, found themselves suddenly transplanted in Europe,* in, as it were, another universe. For a time, therefore, and of necessity, they had to be portrayed as filled with ignorance and prejudice; the only important consideration was to make clear the genesis and development of their ideas. Their first thinking had to be strange. It seemed proper to lend them only that sort of strangeness congenial to wit; the author had only to paint the feelings they experienced upon encountering each thing that seemed extraordinary to them. Far from thinking of involving any principle of our religion, there was not even the suspicion of imprudence. These touches in the characters are always linked to a simple feeling of surprise and astonishment on their part and not in any way to the idea of logical investigation and even less to any notion of criticism.* While speaking of our religion these Persians could not appear better informed than when they were speaking of our customs and traditions, and if they sometimes find our dogmas unusual, such feelings of the unusual are always stamped with their complete ignorance as to the real connections between those dogmas and our other verities.

This justification is being made out of love for those great verities, quite apart from a respect for humankind, which the author did not want to wound in its tenderest area.* The reader is therefore begged never for a moment to stop seeing these aspects under discussion as effects of the surprise of people who naturally had to be surprised, or as paradoxes constructed by men who were not even in a position to see paradoxes. He is asked to be aware that the whole delight of the book consisted in the eternal contrast between real things and the unusual, new,* or strange ways in which those things are perceived. Certainly the nature and intent of *The Persian Letters* are so clear that the book can never deceive anyone except those who choose to deceive themselves.

PREFACE (1721)

I am writing here no dedicatory epistle, and I ask no sponsorship for this book. It will be read if it is good. If it is bad, I am not concerned about its being read.

I have extracted these first letters to try out the public taste. I have a great number of others in my portfolio which I can give the public hereafter.

However, only on condition that I shall remain unknown, because as soon as someone tries to know my name, just that soon shall I grow silent. I know a woman who walks rather well as a rule but who starts to limp as soon as she is watched.[5] *There are already enough shortcomings in my work without my adding for the critics those of my person. If they knew who I was, they would say: "His book clashes with his character; he ought to use his time to better purpose. This is not worthy of a serious man." Critics never miss the occasion for such remarks, since they can be made without demanding much of one's wit.*

The Persians who wrote these letters were staying with me; we spent our lives together. Since they thought of me as a

man from another world, they hid nothing from me. As a matter of fact, people transplanted from such a distance could no longer have any secrets. They passed along to me most of their letters; I copied them. I even came upon some that they would have taken pains not to let me see, so mortifying were these letters to Persian vanity and pride.

Thus I serve merely as translator; my entire concern has been to adapt the work to our own manners. I have spared the reader from the Asiatic tongue as much as I could and have saved him from an infinity of sublime expressions that would have bored him colossally.*

But that is not all I have done for him. I have cut the long complimentary formulas with which Orientals are no less generous than ourselves, and I have passed over an infinite number of those trifles that tolerate the broad daylight so badly and that should always perish between two friends.

If the majority of those who have given us collections of letters had done as much, they would have seen their work vanish into thin air.

One thing has often astonished me, and that is to see these Persians sometimes as well informed as myself on the customs and affairs of our Nation, to the point of knowing the most subtle details and noticing things I am sure have escaped many Germans visiting France. I attribute this to their long stay here, without insisting on the fact that it is easier for an Asiatic to learn about French customs in one year than it would be for a Frenchman to learn Asiatic customs in four. That is because one group is as open in its relations as the other is close-mouthed.*

Tradition has always permitted the translator—even the most barbarous commentator—to decorate the beginning of his adaptation or gloss with a panegyric of the original and there point out the importance, the value, and the excellence of it. This I have not done at all, and my good reasons for not doing so can be surmised. One of the best reasons is that it would be a very boring business, coming as it does in a place already very boring in itself. I mean a preface.

Per servir sempre,
o vincitrice, o vinta.
—FILICAIA

Le bon sens consiste beaucoup
à conaître les nuances des choses.
—MONTESQUIEU[6]

LETTER I [6]

Usbek to his friend Rustan in Ispahan

We stayed only one day at Qum. After we had finished our devotions on the tomb of the Virgin who gave twelve prophets to the world,[7] we continued our journey, and yesterday, the twenty-fifth day after our departure from Ispahan, we arrived in Tabriz.

Rica and I are perhaps the first among the Persians who have been moved by a desire for knowledge to leave their country and to give up the savors of a peaceful life that they might go seek wisdom the hard way.

We were born in a flourishing kingdom, but we did not believe that its borders should be those of our knowledge nor that Oriental insight alone should enlighten us.

Let me know what they are saying about our trip. Do not spare me; I am not counting on any great amount of approval. Address your letter to Erzerum,[8] where I shall be staying for a while.

Farewell, my dear Rustan. Rest assured that in whatever part of the world I may be, you have a faithful friend.

From Tabriz, the 15th of the
Moon of Saphar,[9] 1711.

LETTER II

Usbek to the first black eunuch in his seraglio in Ispahan

You are the faithful guardian of the most beautiful women in Persia. I have entrusted to you what is most precious to me of all my worldly possessions. You hold in your hand the keys of those fateful doors that open only for me. While you watch over this precious depository of my heart, it rests at ease and enjoys a feeling of complete security. You mount the guard in the silence of the night as well as during the tumult of the day; your tireless attentions uphold virtue when it vacillates. If the women you are guarding tried to abandon their duty, you would make them give up such hopes. You are the scourge of evil and the pillar of fidelity.

You command and you obey them; you carry out blindly all their desires, and in the same way, you make them

carry out the laws of the harem. You find your glory in rendering them the lowliest service; you yield with fear and respect to their legitimate commands; you serve them like a slave of their slaves. But, by an exchange of authority, you command as master like myself whenever you fear a weakening of the laws of decency and modesty.

Remember always the void from which I drew you, when you were the lowliest of my slaves, to elevate you to your position and entrust to you the delights of my heart. Preserve your deep humility among those who share my love, but make them feel at the same time their utter dependence. Seek for them all innocent pleasures; calm their fears; divert them with music, dances, delicious drinks; persuade them to assemble together often. If they want to go to the country, you may take them, but arrange to seize any man who ventures into their presence. Encourage cleanliness in them, for it is the image of the soul's purity. Speak to them sometimes of me. I should like to see them again in that charming spot they adorn.

Farewell.

From Tabriz, the 18th of the Moon of Saphar, 1711.*

LETTER III

Zachi to Usbek in Tabriz

We have ordered the chief eunuch to take us to the country. He will tell you that no accident befell us. When we had to cross the river and leave our palanquins, we placed ourselves, as is the custom, into boxes;[10] two slaves carried us on their shoulders, and we were safe from all regard.

How should I have been able to live on, dear Usbek, in your Ispahan seraglio, in surroundings which, ever recalling my past pleasures, aroused my desires each day with renewed violence? I wandered from apartment to apartment, seeking you always, finding you never, but everywhere falling upon the cruel memory of my past felicity. Sometimes I imagined I was in that place where for the first time in my life, I took you into my arms; sometimes, in the place where you concluded that famous quarrel

among your wives. Each of us had made pretense to a superiority in beauty over the others. We all appeared before you after having exhausted our imaginations in finery and ornament. You looked with pleasure on these miracles of our art; you admired how far the ardor of pleasing you could carry us. But you soon made those borrowed charms give way before more natural graces: you destroyed all our handiwork. We had to strip ourselves of that finery which had become an annoyance to you; we had to present ourselves to your view in the simplicity of nature. I gave no thought to decency; I thought only of my vanity. Happy Usbek, what charms were displayed before your eyes! We saw you wander long from one delight to the next; your wavering soul remained for a long time in a state of indecision; each new grace extorted its tribute from you; we were all, in the twinkling of an eye, covered with your kisses; you extended your curious regard to the most secret spots; in a trice, you made us assume a thousand different positions—ever a new command and ever a new submission. I confess it to you, Usbek: a passion much more keen than ambition made me want to please you. I saw myself surreptitiously becoming the mistress of your heart. You took me, you left me, you came back to me, and I learned how to hold your attention. The triumph was all mine, and disappointment the lot of my rivals. It seemed to us that we were alone in the world. Nothing that surrounded us was any longer worthy of our attention. Oh, that heaven had granted my rivals the courage to stay and witness all the tokens of love I received from you! If they had but seen my transports, they would have felt the difference between my love and their own. They would have seen that even if they could dispute with me over my charms, they could not dispute my capacity for feeling. . . .

But where have I strayed? Where does this empty recital take me? It is a misfortune not to be loved at all, but it is an affront to have to stop being loved. You abandon us, Usbek, to go wandering in barbaric climes. How then! Do you count for nothing the privilege of being loved? Alas, you do not even know what you are missing! I utter sighs that are not heard; my tears are flowing and you will not find joy in them. The seraglio fairly breathes with love and your unfeelingness takes you ever farther away

from it! Ah, my dear Usbek, if only you knew how to be happy!

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 21st of the Moon of Maharram, 1711.

LETTER IV

Zephis to Usbek in Erzerum

Finally that black monster has decided to bring me to utter desperation. He wants to deprive me of my slave Zelide at all costs—Zelide, who serves me with so much affection, whose hands carry with them everywhere embellishment and charm. And he is not satisfied that the separation should be only painful; he wants to dishonor us. The traitor would judge as reprehensible the motives of my intimacy with her, and because he is bored behind the door where I always send him, he dares to suppose that he has heard and seen things that I cannot even imagine.[11] I am most unhappy! Neither my retirement nor my virtue could possibly shield me from his extravagant suspicions. A vile slave dares to attack me in the very recesses of your heart, and I am forced to justify myself! Ah, no, I have too much self-respect to descend to such justifications. I desire no other guarantee of my conduct save yourself, save your love, save my own, and, if I must tell you all, my dear Usbek, save my tears.

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 29th of the Moon of Maharram, 1711.

LETTER V *

Rustan to Usbek in Erzerum

You are the subject of every conversation in Ispahan. There is talk only of your departure. Some attribute it to an inconsequential whim; others, to some disappointment. Only your friends defend you, and they convince no one. People cannot understand how you can leave your women, your relatives, your friends, and your country to venture into climates unknown to Persians. Rica's mother is not to be consoled; she asks you for her son, whom, she says,

you have stolen from her. As for me, my dear Usbek, I am naturally inclined to approve everything you do. But I could not possibly forgive your absence, and whatever the reasons you might offer me for it, my heart shall never approve of them.

Farewell. Love me always.

From Ispahan, the 28th of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1711.

LETTER VI *

Usbek to his friend Nessir in Ispahan

One day's journey from Erivan,[12] we left Persia and entered the lands under Turkish dominion. Twelve days later, we arrived at Erzerum, where we shall stay three or four months.

I must confess to you, Nessir, that I felt a secret pang when I lost sight of Persia and found myself in the midst of those perfidious Osmanlis.[13] As I pushed forward into the lands of the profane ones,[14] it seemed to me that I became profane myself.

My country, my family, my friends invaded my mind; my affections came alive again; in the end a certain uneasiness troubled my thoughts and made me understand that, for my own peace of mind, I had undertaken too much.

But what most afflicts my heart is the thought of my wives. I cannot think of them without my heart's being devoured by grief.

It is not so much that I love them, Nessir. In this respect, I find myself in a state devoid of feeling, leaving me with no desires at all. In the well-populated seraglio where I lived, I anticipated love and destroyed it by loving. But from my very coldness there grows a secret jealousy that devours me. I see a flock of women left almost to themselves; to assure me of their conduct, I have only a collection of weak souls. I should find it difficult to feel secure even if my slaves were faithful. What must be my feelings, then, if they are not faithful? What sad news may come to me in the distant countries I am to visit! This is

a torture in which my friends cannot help me; this is an area whose sad secrets must remain unknown. For what could they do for me in this matter? Should I not a thousand times prefer obscure impunity to resounding punishment? I lay at your heart, my dear Nessir, all my vexations. This is the only consolation left to me in my present state.

From Erzerum, the 10th of the Moon of Rebiab II, 1711.

LETTER VII

Fatima to Usbek in Erzerum

You have been gone for two months, my dear Usbek, and in the depression in which I now find myself, I can still not bring myself to believe it. I run about throughout the whole harem as if you were still here. I am not one whit undeceived. What do you hope will happen to a woman who loves you, who was used to holding you in her arms, who thought only of the care of giving you proof of her affection—a woman, free by the good fortune of birth, yet slave by the violence of her love?

When I married you, my eyes had never yet beheld a man's face. Yours is still the only one I have been permitted to see,[15] for I do not count as men those frightful eunuchs whose least fault is the very fact that they are not men at all. When I contrast the beauty of your lovely face with the deformity of theirs, I can count myself fortunate. My imagination furnishes me no more delightful idea than the enchanting charms of your person. I swear it to you, Usbek: even were I permitted to leave this place where I am enclosed by the necessity of my calling, were I capable of eluding the encircling guards, were I able to choose among all the men living in this capital of nations, Usbek, I swear it, I should choose only you. In all the world, there can be only you worthy of being loved.

Do not fear that your absence has made me neglect beauty that is so dear to you. Although I am to be seen by no one and although the finery in which I array myself is useless for your present happiness, still I attempt to maintain the habit of pleasing. I never go to bed without being perfumed with the most delicious scents. I remem-

ber those happy times when you would come to my arms. A happy dream, seducing me, brings before me the dear object of my love. My imagination is lost in his desires, it takes hope from his hopes. I think sometimes that you will grow weary with a tedious journey and come back to us. Nights pass in dreams that belong neither to sleep nor to waking. I seek you at my side and you seem to be fleeing me. At last, the fire that consumes me dissipates these enchantments of itself and brings back my consciousness. At these times I feel so aroused . . .

You would not believe it, Usbek, but it is impossible to go on living in this condition. Fire is flowing in my veins. Why can I not express to you what I feel so clearly? And how is it possible for me to feel so well what I cannot express to you? In such moments, Usbek, I should give the dominion of the whole world for a single one of your kisses. How miserable it is for a woman to have such violent desires when she is deprived of him who alone can satisfy them; when, reduced to her own resources, having nothing to distract her, she must live in close acquaintance with sighs and in the frenzy of aroused passion; when, far from being happy, she has not even the benefit of serving the happiness of another—useless adornment of a seraglio, kept for the honor and not for the happiness of her husband!

You men are very cruel! You are delighted that we should have passions we cannot satisfy. You treat us as if we were without feelings and yet you would be very displeased if this were so. You think that our desire, frustrated for so long, will be better aroused at the sight of you. It is difficult to make oneself loved. It is easier for you to glean* from the affliction of our senses what you dare not expect from your own worth.

Farewell, my dear Usbek, farewell. Know that I live only to adore you. My soul is completely filled with you; and your absence, far from making me forget you, would enliven my love for you if it could possibly become any more violent.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 12th of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1711.

LETTER VIII

Usbek to his friend Rustan in Ispahan

Your letter was delivered to me at Erzerum, where I now am. I was quite sure that my departure would cause talk. I am not at all upset by it. Which would you have me follow: the good judgment of my enemies, or my own?

I came to court at a very early age. I can say that my heart was in no way corrupted there. I even formed a noble resolution: I dared to be virtuous in those surroundings. So soon as I recognized vice, I withdrew from it, but I came back to it again to unmask it. I carried truth to the very steps of the throne. I spoke there a hitherto unknown language; I brought flattery to confusion, and astonished at once both the worshippers and their idol.

But when I realized that my sincerity had made enemies for me, that I had drawn on myself the jealousy of ministers without having won the favor of the Prince, and that in a corrupt court I managed to buoy myself up only by an already enfeebled virtue, then I decided to leave. I pretended to possess a great devotion to learning, and by dint of pretense, such devotion actually came to me. I became involved in no more intrigues and withdrew to my country house. But this solution had its own disadvantages. I still remained exposed to the malice of my enemies, but I had almost completely removed the means of protecting myself from them. Some confidential advice made me think seriously about my future. I decided to exile myself from my country, and my withdrawal from the court provided me with a plausible pretext. I went to the King. I pointed out to him my great desire to become educated in Western sciences. I hinted that he might draw some profit from my travels. I found understanding in his eyes. I left and thereby robbed my enemies of a victim.

There, Rustan, is the true motive for my trip. Let them talk in Ispahan. Come to my defense only with my friends. Leave to my enemies their evil interpretations. I am only too happy that this should be the only harm they can do me.

At the present moment there is talk of me. Perhaps I shall be only too easily forgotten hereafter and my friends

. . . No, Rustan, I shall not give myself over to such a sad thought. I shall always be dear to them. I count on their fidelity as I do on your own.

From Erzerum, the 20th* of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER IX

The first eunuch to Ibbi in Erzerum

You are following your former master in his voyages; you are passing through provinces and kingdoms. Vexations could not possibly make any impression on you. Every moment brings you new things to see. All that you are seeing diverts you and makes you pass the time without feeling it.

Such is not the case with me, closed up as I am in a fearful prison, ever surrounded by the same objects and consumed by the same griefs. I sigh, overwhelmed as I am by the weight of fifty years of cares and anxieties. In the course of a long life I can say that I have had not one peaceful day nor any tranquil moment.

When my first master had settled on the cruel plan of entrusting his women to me and had obliged me by seductions doubled with a thousand threats to separate me forever from myself, I planned, weary of the most laborious tasks, to sacrifice my passions to tranquillity and fortune. Unhappy man that I was! My preoccupation of mind made me see the recompense but not the loss. I hoped to be delivered from the seizure of love by my impotence to satisfy it. Alas for me! The effect of passion was snuffed out in me without extinguishing the cause, and far from being comforted, I found myself surrounded by objects that provoked my passion without cease. I entered into the harem, where everything aroused the regret of what I had lost. I found myself excited every moment; a thousand natural charms seemed to be displayed to my eyes only to torment me. As the crowning stroke to my misery, I had ever before my eyes a happy man. During these troubled times, I never led a woman to my master's bed, I never undressed her without returning to my room with rage in my heart and horrible desolation in my soul.

That is how I spent my miserable youth. I had only

myself for intimate friend. The cares and vexations with which I was laden, I was forced to consume within myself. The same women whom I was tempted to behold with such tender eyes, I could look at only with severity. I would have been lost if they had understood. What advantage they would have taken of me!

I remember that one day I was putting a woman in her bath and I felt so carried away that I lost my reason completely and dared to move my hand to a dread spot.[16] At first I thought that day would be my last. I was, however, fortunate enough to escape a thousand deaths. But the beauty who became thus party to my weakness sold her silence dearly. I lost my authority over her completely, and she has since that time forced me into complaisances that have exposed me a thousand times to losing my life.

Finally, the flames of youth have passed. I am old, and as concerns all that, I am at peace. I behold women with indifference, and I return to them all the scorn and torture they have made me suffer. I remember always that I was born to command them, and it seems to me that I become a man again when I can still do so. I have detested them ever since the moment I was able to consider them objectively, since my reason has allowed me to see all their weaknesses. Although I watch over them for another, the pleasure of making myself obeyed gives me a secret joy. When I deprive them of everything, I feel I do so for my own benefit, and indirectly, I always receive great satisfaction from it. In the seraglio it is as if I were in a small empire, and my ambition, the sole passion left to me, is satisfied a little. I can see with pleasure that everything turns on me and that I am needed every moment. I accept willingly the hate of all those women, and this strengthens me in my position. Still, they are not dealing with an ungrateful wretch: they always find me co-operative in their most innocent pleasures. I represent to them an unshakable barrier: they dream up plans, and I put an immediate stop to them. I fortify myself with refusal; I bristle with scruples. There are never any other words in my mouth save duty, virtue, decency, and modesty. I bring them to despair by talking continually about the weakness of their sex and the authority of the master. I thereupon complain of having to be so severe, and I pretend to want them to understand that I act from no other

motive than their own well-being and my great affection for them.

This does not mean that I do not suffer, in my turn, an infinite amount of unpleasantness, or that these vindictive women do not each day try to return to me, twofold, the unpleasantness I cause them. They are capable of terrible revenge. There exists between us something like an ebb and flow of dominion and submission. They always arrange to have the most humiliating tasks fall on me. They make a show of unexampled scorn, and with no regard for my advanced age, they cause me to get up at night for the most inconsequential whim. I am forever weighed down under orders, commands, chores, and fancies. They seem to spell each other at harassing me; they seem to arrange their whims. Often they take pleasure in making me redouble my attentions. They arrange to involve me in false intrigue: now one of them comes to tell me that a young man has appeared around the walls; another time, that they have heard a noise or that a letter is to be delivered. All this unnerves me, and they laugh at my confusion. They are delighted to see me torment myself in this way. On other occasions they keep me behind their door and chain me there day and night; they know very well how to feign sickness, fainting, and fright; they do not lack pretexts for leading me to the point where they want me. On such occasions one must show blind obedience and limitless compliance. A refusal coming from the mouth of a man like me would be unheard of, and were I to hesitate in obeying them, they would have the right to punish me. I should rather lose my life completely, dear Ibbi, than descend to such humiliation.

Nor is that the whole story. I am never for one moment sure of being in my master's favor. I have all these enemies in his heart, intent only upon destroying me. The women pass through moments when I am not obeyed at all, moments when they give in to my every bidding, moments when I am always in the wrong. I take angered women to my master's bed. Do you think they work in my behalf there, or that my side is the stronger? I have everything to fear from their tears, from their sighs, from their embraces, from their very pleasures. They are in their glory there. Their charms can become terrible for me. Present services rendered wipe out in one moment all my

services of the past, and there is no being sure of a master who is no longer himself.

How many times has it happened to me to retire in favor and arise in disgrace! That day when I was so scandalously whipped all over the seraglio, what had I done? I left a woman in my master's arms. As soon as she saw that he was excited, she poured forth a torrent of tears. She complained and arranged her bewailing so well that this added to the measure of love she was arousing. How could I possibly have justified myself at such a time? I was lost when I expected it least. I was the victim of amorous negotiation, of a treaty made with sighs. That, dear Ibbi, is the cruel situation in which I have ever lived.

How fortunate you are! Your cares are limited only to Usbek's person. It is easy for you to please him and to keep yourself in his favor until the end of your days.

From the seraglio at Ispahan, the last of the Moon of Saphar, 1711.

LETTER X *

Mirza to his friend Usbek in Erzerum

You are the only person who could make up for the absence of Rica, and there was only Rica who could console me for yours. We miss you, Usbek; you were the soul of our circle. What violence does it take to break the ties formed by heart and mind!

We discuss many things here. Our discussions usually turn about the subject of ethics. Yesterday we argued the question whether men were happy through the pleasures and satisfactions of the senses or through the practice of virtue. I have often heard you say that men were born to be virtuous and that justice is a quality as proper to man as existence. Explain to me, I beg of you, what you mean.

I have spoken to some mullahs[17] who drive me to desperation with their passages of the Koran, for I do not speak to them as true believer but rather as man, citizen, and father.

Farewell.

From Ispahan, the last of the Moon of Saphar, 1711.

LETTER XI

Usbek to Mirza in Ispahan

You renounce your own reason and fall back on mine. You condescend to consult me; you judge me capable of instructing you. My dear Mirza, there is one thing that flatters me still more than the good opinion you have had of me: your friendship, which procures that opinion for me.*

To carry out what you have required of me, I did not think it proper to use much abstract reasoning. There are certain truths that it is not enough to impress by rational conviction, that must be felt. Such are the verities of ethics. Perhaps this bit of history will touch you more than some subtle philosophy.

There once lived in Arabia a small tribe called Troglodytes,[18] descended from those ancient Troglodytes who, if one is to believe the historians, resembled beasts more closely than men. These people were not at all deformed, nor were they hairy like wolves, nor did they hiss. They had two eyes, but they were so wicked and so ferocious that there existed among them no principle of equity and justice.

They had a king, of foreign origin, who, wishing to correct the wickedness of their natural dispositions, treated them with great severity. But they conspired against him, killed him, and exterminated the whole royal family.

This action completed, they assembled to choose a new government, and after much dissension, they created magistrates. But scarcely had they elected the magistrates when they found the new men unbearable and massacred them.

This race, freed of the new yoke, turned for guidance solely to their innate savage character. All the individuals agreed that they would no longer obey anyone and that each would look out strictly for his own interests without regard to the interests of others.

This unanimous resolution pleased all the individuals extremely well. They would say: "Why should I kill myself working for people I don't care a thing about? I shall think only of myself and I shall live happily. What matter to me whether others can do so or not? I shall provide for all my needs and so long as I have managed that, it mat-

ters nothing to me that all the other Troglodytes should be miserable."

It was the season for planting the fields. Each man said: "I shall cultivate my land only enough to furnish what grain I need to eat. A larger amount would be useless to me; I shall not go to such trouble for nothing."

The soils of this little realm were not of equal quality. There were dry, mountainous terrains, and then others that, lying lower, were watered by several streams. That year the drought was great, so that the elevated terrain lacked all sustenance, whereas the ground that could be watered was very fertile. Thus practically all the mountain people perished of hunger because of the hard hearts of the others, who refused to share their harvest.

The following year was very rainy. The elevated lands were extraordinarily fertile, and the low-lying lands were submerged. Half of the people again cried famine, but these miserable people came up against men as hard as they had been themselves.

One of the leading inhabitants had an extremely beautiful wife; his neighbor fell in love with her and abducted her. There arose a great quarrel and after many insults and many blows, they agreed to refer the matter to the decision of a certain Troglodyte, a man who during the Republic, had enjoyed a good reputation. They went before him and tried to give their sides of the affair. "What does it matter to me," said this man, "whether the woman is yours, or yours? I have my field to cultivate, and it's just possible I am not going to use up my time settling your differences and working at your affairs while I neglect my own. I pray you to leave me in peace and distract me no more with your quarrels." Thereupon he left them and went off to work his land. The wife-stealer, who was stronger than the other fellow, swore that he would die rather than give back the woman, and the other fellow, grieved by his neighbor's injustice and by the judge's harshness, was returning home in despair, when on his road he found a young and beautiful woman coming back from the fountain. He had no wife now; this one pleased him. And she pleased him even more when he learned that she was the wife of the man he had wanted to judge the case, the man who had been so insensitive to his misfortune. He abducted her and took her home.

There was a man who owned a rather fertile field, which he cultivated with great care. Two of his neighbors joined together, chased him from his house, and took over his field. They made between themselves an agreement of mutual protection against all those who might wish to rob them, and in effect, they managed to uphold each other thereby for several months. But then one of them, tired of sharing what he could have alone, killed the other and became sole owner of the field. His dominion did not last long. Two other Troglodytes came and attacked him. He was too weak to defend himself, and he was killed.

A Troglodyte, very close to being naked, saw some wool for sale. He asked the price. The merchant said to himself: "Naturally, I ought not expect from my wool more than the wherewithal to buy two measures of grain. But I am going to sell it for four times more money and thus get eight measures." The buyer had to give in and pay the price asked. "I am quite happy with this transaction," said the merchant, "and now I need some grain."

"What's that you say?" replied the buyer. "You need some grain? I happen to have some for sale. It's just that the price might surprise you, for you must know that grain is extremely dear and that famine is the rule almost everywhere. But give me back my money and I shall give you one measure of wheat. For I should not choose to dispose of it on any other terms were you to die of hunger."

Meanwhile, a cruel sickness was ravaging the countryside. A clever physician came from a neighboring country and gave such fitting remedies that he cured all those who put themselves under his care. When the sickness had stopped, he went to all he had treated and asked for his payment. But he met everywhere with nothing but refusals to pay. He returned to his own country and arrived there broken by the vigors of such a long journey. Soon after he learned that the same disease was making itself felt once again and was more than ever afflicting that ungrateful country. This time they came to him and did not wait for him to come to them. "Be off," he said to them, "be off, evil men. You have in your souls a poison more fatal than the disease you seek to cure. You do not deserve to occupy a place on the earth, for you have no humanity and the rules of justice are unknown to you. I should feel I was

offending the gods as they punish you, were I to oppose the justice of their wrath."

From Erzerum, the 3rd of the Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XII

Usbek to the same in Ispahan

You have seen, my dear Mirza, how the Troglodytes perished by reason of their very wickedness and how they were victims of their own injustice. Out of all these families there remained only two to escape the misfortunes of the nation. There were in that country two extraordinary men: they possessed humanity; they were acquainted with justice; they loved virtue. As bound together by their uprightness of heart as were the others by their corruption, they could see the general desolation and reacted to it only with pity. This was the motive for a new union. They worked with common solicitude for the common welfare. Their only differences were those that a sweet and tender friendship can give rise to, and in the most remote region of the country, separated from compatriots unworthy of their company, they were leading a peaceful and happy life. The earth, cultivated by these virtuous hands, seemed to produce of her own accord.

They loved their wives and were, in turn, tenderly cherished by them. The whole of their efforts was turned to bringing up their children in the paths of virtue. They continually pointed out to them the misfortunes of their compatriots, continually held up before their eyes this sad example. Above all, they made them feel that the welfare of the individual is always to be found in the common good, and that to want to stray from it is to seek destruction; they taught them that virtue is not something that should cost us effort, that it is not to be considered a painful exercise; and that justice to others is like charity to ourselves.

They soon had the reward of virtuous fathers, which is to have children like themselves. The young people growing up under their eyes increased in number through happy marriages. Their numbers continued to grow; their union remained the same, and virtue, far from weakening

amid this multitude, was, on the contrary, fortified by a greater number of examples.

Who could describe here the happiness of the Troglodytes? Such a just people must have been cherished by the gods. As soon as the Troglodytes opened their eyes and knew them, they learned to fear them, and religion came to smooth off any excess of roughness left in their customs* by nature.

They instituted celebrations in honor of the gods. Young boys and flower-bedecked young ladies celebrated these festivals with dancing and the sweet accords of country music. Afterward, there were banquets in which joy took no lesser role than frugality. It was in such congregation that simple Nature made herself heard: it was here they learned to give and take hearts; it was here that virginal chastity made, amid blushes, its surprised confession, a confession soon confirmed by the father's consent; it was here that mothers took joy in foreseeing from afar a tender and faithful union.[19]

They would go to the temple to seek the favors of the gods. The prayers were not for riches or for burdensome abundance—such were unworthy of our happy Troglodytes. They could envisage favors only for their compatriots. They came to the foot of the altar only to ask for the health of their fathers, the marriage of their brothers, the tender love of their wives, the affection and obedience of their children. Girls came only to lay down the tender sacrifice of their hearts and sought no other blessing than that of making a Troglodyte happy.

In the evening, when the flocks had left the plains and the weary oxen had brought the plow home, they would congregate, and over a frugal meal, sing of the injustice and misfortunes of the first Troglodytes, of the rebirth of virtue in a new people, and of its felicity. They would celebrate the grandeur of the gods and their ever-present favors to men who turn to them, as well as their inevitable wrath visited upon those who fear them not. Then they would describe the delights of country living and the happiness that accompanies a way of life continually crowned with innocence. Soon they would yield to a slumber never interrupted by cares and worries.

Nature ministered no less to their desires than to their needs. In this happy country, cupidity was completely

foreign. They would exchange presents in such a way that the giver always felt he had the advantage. The Troglodyte people thought of themselves as a single family. Their flocks were almost always intermixed; the only trouble they ordinarily spared themselves was trying to separate them.[20]

From Erzerum, the 6th of the Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XIII

Usbek to the same

I could not possibly say enough to you about the virtue of the Troglodytes. One day, one of them said: "Tomorrow my father must plow his field. I shall get up two hours before he does, and when he goes to his field, he will find it already plowed."

Another would say to himself: "I think my sister feels an inclination for one of our Troglodyte relatives. I must speak to my father about this young man and persuade him to arrange a marriage."

They came to another to say that thieves had taken his herd. "I am quite angry about that," he said, "for there was a pure white heifer I wanted to offer to the gods."

You might hear another of them say: "I must go to the temple with thanks for the gods because my brother, whom my father loves so much and whom I cherish dearly, has recovered his health."

Or perhaps: "There is a field that borders on a field of my father, and the workers there are always exposed to the intense heat of the sun. I must plant a couple of trees so that those poor people can from time to time rest in the shade."

One day when several Troglodytes were gathered together, an old man spoke of a young man whom he suspected of an evil action and reproached him for it. "We cannot believe that he has committed this crime," said the young Troglodytes. "But if he has done it, then may he be the last of his family to die!"

It was announced to a Troglodyte that strangers had put his house to pillage and had carried off everything. "If they were not unjust men," he replied, "I should wish that the gods might give them longer benefit from it than I had."

So much prosperity was not observed without envy. Neighboring peoples came together, and on some empty pretext, resolved to seize the Troglodyte flocks. As soon as they learned of such a resolve, the Troglodytes sent ambassadors to them and addressed them thus:[21]

"What have the Troglodytes done to you? Have they carried off your wives? Stolen your cattle? Ravaged your fields? No, for we are just and fear the gods. What then do you ask of us? Would you like wool to make clothes for yourselves? Would you like milk for your animals, or the fruits of our soil? Put down your arms; come among us, and we shall give you all of that. But we swear by all that is most sacred that if you come into our lands as enemies, we shall consider you an unjust people and we shall treat you as we should treat wild beasts."

These words were turned down with scorn. The savage tribes came armed into the lands of the Troglodytes, for they thought they were defended only by their innocence.

But the Troglodytes were well prepared for their own defense. They had placed their wives and children in their midst. They were astonished not by the numbers of the enemy but by their injustice. A renewed enthusiasm took hold of their hearts: one man wanted to die for his father; another, for his wife and children; one chose to die for his brothers; another, for his friends; and every man, for the Troglodyte people. The position of a man dying in battle was immediately taken by another who in addition to the common cause, now had a particular death to avenge.

Such was the battle of Injustice and Virtue. Those cowardly peoples who sought only booty were not ashamed to flee; they yielded to the virtue of the Troglodytes, without even being touched.

From Erzerum, the 9th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XIV

Usbek to the same

As their tribe was growing every day, the Troglodytes thought it a proper time to choose a king. They agreed that

they should tender the crown to the man who was the most upright among them, and they all cast their eyes on an old man, venerated for his years and for a long record of virtue. He had not wanted to take part in their assembly. He had withdrawn to his house, his heart sore with sadness.

When they sent the deputies to inform him that their choice had fallen on him, he said: "God forbid that I should commit this wrong against the Troglodytes and that anyone could think that there is no one among you more just than myself! You are offering me the crown, and if you absolutely insist on it, I shall naturally have to take it. But realize that I shall die of grief to have seen Troglodytes born free and now see them subjects." On these words, he began to pour forth a torrent of tears. "Oh, unhappy day!" he said, "why did I have to live so long?" Then he cried out in a stern voice: "I can see what is happening, O Troglodytes! Your virtue is beginning to weigh upon you. In the present state of affairs, with no chief, you must be virtuous in spite of yourselves. Otherwise you couldn't subsist and would fall into the misfortunes of your forefathers. But this yoke seems too hard to you. You prefer to be subjects of a prince and obey his laws, for they are less restrictive than your customs. You know that from now on, you can satisfy your ambition, acquire riches, and languish in soft luxury, and that so long as you avoid falling into great crimes, you will have no need of virtue." He stopped a moment as his tears flowed more profusely than before. "Well then, what would you have me do? How could I give orders to a Troglodyte? Do you hope that he will commit a virtuous deed because I command him to do so, a man who would do it anyhow, without me and by the sole inclination of nature? O Troglodytes, I am coming to the end of my days. My blood stands frozen in my veins. I shall soon see your sacred forebears. Why would you have me afflict them and oblige me to tell them that I have left you here under any yoke other than that of Virtue?" [22]

From Erzerum, the 10th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XV*

The first eunuch to Jaron, black eunuch, in Erzerum

I pray that heaven bring you back into these precincts and shield you from all dangers.

Although I have scarcely ever known that tie called friendship, although I have consciously been wrapped up entirely in myself, you have yet made me feel that I still possess a heart; and while for all the slaves living under my orders, I was as hard as bronze, I saw your childhood advance with pleasure.

The time came when my master cast his eyes on you. Nature was far from having her word when the blade separated you forever from nature. I shall not say whether I pitied you or whether I felt pleasure in seeing you raised to my level. I quieted your tears and your outcries. I thought of you as having a second birth and taking leave of a servitude in which you always had to obey, to enter another kind of servitude, where you were to command. I took care of your education. My severity, ever joined to my precepts, made you unaware for a long time that you were dear to me. And yet you were dear to me, and I should tell you that I loved you as a father loves his son, if these terms father and son could apply to our destiny.

You will travel through countries inhabited by Christians who have never been believers. It is not possible for you to do so without being subjected to many defilements. How could the Prophet keep an eye on you in the midst of so many millions of his enemies? When he returns, I should like my master to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. You could all purify yourselves in the land of the angels.

Farewell.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 10th of the Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XVI*

Usbek to the mullah Mehemet-Ali, guardian of the three tombs at Qum[23]

Why, O divine mullah, dost thou live in tombs? Thou art much more qualified for a home in the stars. No doubt

thou hidest away for fear of obscuring the sun. Like that heavenly body, thou art without blemish, but just like him, thou covereth thyself with clouds.

Thy knowledge is an abyss deeper than the ocean; thy mind is keener than Zufagar,[24] that two-pointed sword of Ali; thou knowest what is happening in the nine choirs of the heavenly Powers;[25] thou readest the Koran upon the breast of our divine Prophet, and when thou fallest upon some obscure passage, at his behest an angel unfurls speedy wings and descends from the throne to disclose to thee its secret.

By thy intercession, I could have intimate correspondence with the Seraphim, for, O thou thirteenth of the Imams,[26] art thou not really the center where heaven and earth come together, and the point of contact between Abyss and Empyrean? [27]

I am in the midst of a profane people. Allow me to purify myself with thee; suffer me to turn my face toward the sacred places where thou dwellest; mark me off from the wicked, as at break of day, the white thread is distinguished from the black.[28] Assist me with thy counsel; care for my soul; intoxicate it with the spirit of the prophets. Nourish me with knowledge of Paradise and suffer me to lay my wounds at thy feet.

Address thy sacred letters to Erzerum, where I shall be staying several months.

From Erzerum, the 11th of the Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XVII

Usbek to the same

I cannot, divine mullah, calm my impatience. I could not possibly await thy sublime reply. I have doubts. I must trace them down. I feel that my reason is straying; guide it back into the straight path. Come and enlighten me, spring of light. With thy divine pen, blast, as with thunder, the problems I am about to propose to thee. Make me ashamed of myself, cause me to blush at the question I shall put to thee.

Whence does it come that our lawgiver deprives us of the flesh of the pig and of all the other meats he calls

untouchable? Whence does it come that he forbids us to touch a dead body, and that to purify our souls, he commands us to wash our bodies tirelessly? [29] It seems to me that objects in themselves are neither pure nor impure. I cannot think of any quality inherent to the subject which could make them such. Mud appears dirty to us only because it wounds our vision or some other of our senses. Of itself, it is not more soiled than gold or diamonds. The idea of defilement that comes to us from touching a corpse comes only from a natural repugnance we have for such things. If the bodies of those who never washed offended neither our smell nor our sight, how should we have imagined that they be impure?

Our senses, dear mullah, should therefore be our sole judges of the purity or impurity of things. But since objects do not affect men in the same way, since what gives an agreeable sensation to some, produces a disagreeable one with others, it follows that the data of the senses cannot serve here as rule unless one states that each man, according to his fancy, can decide this point for himself and distinguish for his own purposes the pure things from those that are not.

But, holy mullah, wouldn't that very thing upset the distinctions established by our divine Prophet as well as the fundamental points of the law written by the hand of Angels?

From Erzerum, the 20th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1711.

LETTER XVIII

Mehemet-Ali, servant of the prophets, to Usbek in Erzerum

You keep asking us questions that have been put a thousand times to our Holy Prophet. Why do you not read the Traditions[30] of the doctors? Why do you not turn to that pure source of all intelligence? You would find all your doubts resolved.

Unhappy one, forever tied down by the things of this world, you who have never beheld with steady eye the things of heaven, you who revere the mission of mullahs without daring to embrace and follow it!

O profane ones who never enter into the secrets of the

Eternal, whose enlightenment is like unto the shadows of the Abyss, the reasoning of whose mind resembles the dust that your feet do raise up when the sun is in its zenith in the torrid month of Shahban!

Just so does the zenith of your mind never attain unto the nadir of the least of the imams.[31] Your empty philosophy is the lightning flash that announces storm and obscurity. You are in the midst of the tempest, and you wander about at the bidding of the winds.

It is indeed easy to reply to your problem. To do so I need only tell what happened one day to our Holy Prophet when, tempted by the Christians and sorely tested by the Jews, he brought both to confusion.

The Jew Abdias Ibesalon[32] asked him why God had forbidden the eating of the flesh of the pig. "It is not without good reason," replied Mohammed, "for it is an untouchable animal and I shall prove as much to you." With mud, he traced on his hand the figure of a man; he cast it on the ground and cried to it: "Arise!"

In the twinkling of an eye, a man arose and said: "I am Japhet, son of Noah."

"Was your hair so white, when you died?" asked the Holy Prophet.

"No," he replied, "but when you awakened me, I thought the Day of Judgment had come and I felt such sore fright that my hair turned suddenly white."

"Well then, tell me the whole story of Noah's ark," said the Messenger of God to him. Japhet obeyed and told in detail all that had happened during the first months. And then he spoke in the following words:

"We put the excrement of all the animals on one side of the ark, which made it lean over steeply, and we were sore afraid—above all, our wives, who wept in the grand manner. Our father, Noah, having sought the counsel of God, was commanded to take the elephant and have him turn his head toward the side that leaned. That great animal produced such excrement that a pig was born from it."

Can you now believe, Usbek, that from that time on, we have abstained from eating it and have considered it an untouchable animal?

However, since the pig stirred about in the excrement each day, there arose such a stench on the ark that even

he could not keep from sneezing. And there issued forth from the nose of the pig, a rat, who went about gnawing upon all that he found around him. This became so unbearable to Noah that he believed it fitting to consult God again. He was commanded to give the lion a great blow on the forehead, and thereupon the lion also sneezed and caused to issue from his nose a cat. Do you believe that those animals too are untouchable? What do you think of the matter?

When, therefore, you cannot perceive the reason for the impurity of certain things, it is because you do not know so many others, and because you are without the knowledge of what took place between God, the Angels, and men. You do not know the history of eternity. You have not read at all in the books written in heaven. What has been revealed to you is but a small part of the divine library. And those who, like ourselves, approach closer while still in this life, are still withal in obscurity and shadows.[33]

Farewell; may Mohammed be in your heart.

From Qum, the last of the
Moon of Shahban, 1711.

LETTER XIX

Usbek to his friend Rustan in Ispahan

We stayed only a week in Tocat. After thirty-five days of traveling, we arrived in Smyrna.

From Tocat to Smyrna there is not a single city worth mentioning. I saw with astonishment the weakness of the Osmanli empire. This sick body does not subsist on a mild and temperate regimen, but rather on violent remedies that exhaust and consume it endlessly.

The pashas, who obtain their office only by dint of money, come, already ruined themselves, to the provinces and lay waste to them as to a conquered land. An insolent military arm is ruled only by its own caprice. The fortresses are dismantled; the cities deserted. The countryside is desolate; cultivation of land and commerce are entirely abandoned.

Impunity reigns in this strict government: the Christians who till the soil and the Jews who collect the taxes are exposed to a thousand outrages.

The ownership of land is uncertain, and for this reason, enthusiasm for keeping it improved is diminished. There is no claim, no possession that has any weight against the caprice of those who govern.[34]

These barbarians have abandoned all the arts to such a point that they have even neglected the art of war. While the other nations of Europe are every day growing more polished, these people remain in their former ignorance, and they take it into their minds to use the new inventions of Europe only after they have been used a thousand times against them.

They have no maritime experience, no practice in sea tactics. It is said that a handful of Christians sprung forth from a rock[35] makes all the Ottomans sweat, and tires out their empire.

Incapable of carrying on commerce, they endure almost painfully that Europeans, always industrious and enterprising, should come do it for them. They feel they are doing those foreigners a favor to let them grow rich.

Throughout this whole vast stretch of country I have crossed, I have only in Smyrna found a city that can be considered rich and powerful. Europeans make it so, and it is in no way thanks to the Turks that it does not resemble all the others.

There, my dear Rustan, you have a fair idea of this empire, which before another two centuries have passed will be the scene of some conqueror's triumphs.[36]

From Smyrna, the 2nd of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1711.

LETTER XX

Usbek to Zachi, his wife, in the seraglio of Ispahan

You have offended me, Zachi, and I feel in my heart emotions that should cause you to tremble if my remoteness did not allow you the time to change your conduct and calm the violent jealousy that torments me.

I have learned that you were found alone with Nadir, a

white eunuch, who will pay for his deceit and perfidy with his head. How can you have forgotten yourself to the point of not realizing that you are not permitted to receive a white eunuch in your room when you have black ones provided to attend on you? [37] You can repeat all you like that eunuchs are not men and that your virtue places you above thoughts that might be aroused in you by such imperfect resemblance to a man. That does not suffice either for you or for me: for you, since you are doing a thing forbidden to you by the laws of the seraglio; for me, inasmuch as you diminish my honor by exposing yourself to glances . . . what am I saying, glances? Perhaps to the machinations of a traitor who would have soiled you with his crimes, and still more with his regrets and the hopelessness of his impotence.

You will perhaps tell me that you have always been faithful. Come now! Could you have been anything else? How could you have deceived the vigilance of those black eunuchs who are so surprised at the life you are leading? How could you have broken the bolts and the doors that held you in? You vaunt much a virtue that is not free, and perhaps your impure desires have a thousand times over effaced the value and worth of the fidelity of which you boast so much.

I could wish you had not done all I have reason to suspect: that this traitor had not touched you with his unholy hands; that you had refused to be generous in his sight with the delights that belong to his master; that, covered with your gowns, you had left that feeble barrier between him and you; that, he himself, struck by holy respect, had lowered his eyes; that, weakening in his daring, he might have trembled at the thought of the punishment he was preparing for himself. And even if all that were so, it is not any less true that you did a thing contrary to your duty. And supposing that you violated that duty gratuitously, without fulfilling your unruly inclinations? What would you then have done to satisfy them? What more would you do if you could leave the sacred place that is a cruel prison for you? That same place which for your companions is a happy shelter against the attacks of vice, a sacred temple where your sex loses its weakness and becomes invincible despite all the disadvantages of its nature? What would you do if, left to yourself, you

had for sole defense your love for me (which you have so grievously offended) and your duty (which you have so shamelessly betrayed)? How holy are the customs of the country where you live that you should be snatched from the attacks of the lowest slaves! You ought to thank me for the discomfort in which I make you live, for it is only because of it that you deserve to go on living.

You cannot stand the chief eunuch because he always keeps an eye on your conduct and gives you wise counsel. His ugliness, you say, is so great that you cannot behold him without difficulty—as if anyone would put handsomer objects in that sort of post. What bothers you is not having in his stead the white eunuch who does you dishonor.

And what has your first slave done to you? She told you that the familiarities you were taking with young Zelide were contrary to decorum. And that is why you hate her.

I should be a severe judge, Zachi; I am only a husband trying to find you innocent. The love I feel for Roxane, my new wife, has still left me all the affection I ought to have for you, who are no less beautiful. I share my love between the two of you, and Roxane has no other advantage over you than that which virtue can add to beauty.

From Smyrna, the 12th of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1711.

LETTER XXI

Usbek to the first white eunuch

You should tremble as you open this letter, or rather, you should have when you sanctioned Nadir's treachery. You, who now that you have fallen into a cold and languishing old age, cannot without committing a crime, raise your eyes on the fearful objects of my love; you, who are not permitted to put a sacrilegious foot on the threshold of the terrible place that hides those objects from all view; you allowed those whose discipline is entrusted to you to do what you would not have the temerity to do yourself. And still you do not sense the thunderbolts all ready to fall upon them and yourself.

For what are all of you if not base tools that I can break at my fancy—you, who exist only for so long as

you know how to obey; you, who exist in this world only to live under my laws or to die so soon as I shall order; you, who draw breath only so long as my happiness, my love, and even my jealousy have need of your baseness; you, finally, who can hope for no other lot but submission, no other soul but my desires, no other hope save my felicity?

I know that some of my women tolerate impatiently the austere laws of duty, that the continual presence of a black eunuch bothers them, that they are bored with these awful objects, which are given to them to keep them coming back to their husband. All this I know. But you, you are party to this disorder, and you shall be punished in such a way as to cause trembling in all those who take advantage of my trust.

I swear by all the prophets in heaven and by Ali, the greatest of all, that if you stray from your duty, I shall consider your life like unto the insects under my feet.

From Smyrna, the 12th of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1711.

LETTER XXII*

*Jaron to the first eunuch in the seraglio of Ispahan**

As Usbek gets farther and farther away from the harem, his thoughts turn more and more toward his sacred ladies. He sighs, he weeps; his pain grows more bitter, his suspicions swell. He would fain increase the number of his guards. He is going to send me back, along with all the blacks accompanying him. He no longer has any fears for himself; he fears for what is a thousand times dearer than himself.

I am therefore about to live under your command and share your cares. Great God! How much must be done to keep just one man happy!

It seems nature placed women in a state of dependence and then withdrew them from it. Disorder arose between the sexes because their rights were reciprocal. We have entered upon the plane of a new harmony. We have put between women and ourselves, hate; and between men and women, love.

My forehead will grow severe. I shall look about me darkly. Joy shall flee from my lips. The exterior will be calm, but my mind uneasy. I shall not have to wait for the wrinkles of old age to begin showing its vexations.

I should have taken delight in following my master into the West. But my will is his property. He wants me to guard his women: I shall guard them faithfully. I know how I must conduct myself with that sex which when not permitted to be vain, grows haughty, a sex that is easier to humiliate than to destroy.

I kneel at your sight.

From Smyrna, the 12th of the Moon of Zilcade, 1711.

LETTER XXIII

Usbek to his friend Ibben in Smyrna

We have arrived in Leghorn after forty days at sea. It is a new city and bears witness to the ingenuity of the dukes of Tuscany, who, from a swampy village, have made of it the most flourishing city of Italy.

Women enjoy great freedom here. They can look at men through certain windows called *jalousies;* they can go out every day with a few old ladies to accompany them. They have only one veil.[38] Their brothers-in-law, their uncles, their nephews, can see them and the husband hardly ever objects.

It is a grand spectacle for a Mohammedan to see a Christian city for the first time. I am not talking about the things that strike everyone at first, like differences in architecture, clothing, and prevailing customs. For there exists, even in the most insignificant of details, something singular that I feel and cannot express.

We shall leave tomorrow for Marseilles; our stay there will not be long. Rica's intention, and my own, is to arrive as soon as possible in Paris, the seat of empire in Europe. Travelers always seek out big cities, for they are a kind of country common to all foreigners.

Farewell; know that I shall love you always.

From Leghorn, the 12th of the Moon of Saphar, 1712.

LETTER XXIV

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

We have been in Paris for a month and have been continually in motion. It takes much doing to find a place to live, to meet people to whom you are recommended, and to provide yourself with necessities all at the same time.

Paris is as large as Ispahan. The houses here are so high that you would swear they were all inhabited by astrologers. You can readily understand that a city built up in the air, with six or seven houses built one on top of the other, is an extremely populous city, and that when everyone is down in the streets, there is great confusion.

Perhaps you will not believe this, but for the month I have been here, I have seen nobody walking. There are no people in the world who get so much out of their carcasses as the French: they run; they fly. The slow carriages of Asia, the regular pace of our camels, would make them swoon. As for myself, I am not built that way, and when I go walking, as I do often, without changing my pace, I sometimes fume and rage like a Christian. For, passing over the fact that I am splashed from head to foot, still I cannot forgive the elbowings in my ribs that I collect regularly and periodically. A man walking behind me, passes me and turns me half-around; then another, coming toward me from the opposite direction, briskly puts me back into the position where the first fellow hit me. I have barely made a hundred paces before I am more bruised than if I had gone ten leagues.

Do not expect me to be able just now to talk to you seriously about European usages and customs. I have only a faint idea of them myself and have barely had time to be amazed by them.

The King of France is the most powerful prince of Europe. Unlike his neighbor the King of Spain, he has no gold mines. Yet he possesses greater riches, for he draws from the vanity of his subjects a wealth more inexhaustible than mines. He has been known to undertake and wage great wars with no other funds than honorary titles to sell, and by reason of this miracle of human pride, his troops are paid, his fortresses armed, and his navies fitted out.[39]

Moreover, this king is a great magician. He exercises his empire over the very minds of his subjects and makes them think as he likes. If he has only one million crowns in his treasury and he needs two million, he has only to convince them that one crown equals two, and they believe him. If he is involved in a war that is difficult in the waging and finds himself short of money, he has only to put into their heads the notion that a slip of paper is money, and they are immediately convinced.[40] He even goes so far as to make them believe that he can cure them of all manner of disease by touching them,[41] so great is his strength and dominion over their minds.

What I am telling you about this prince ought not astonish you. For there is another magician even more powerful than the first and who has no less dominion over the mind of the first than that one has over the minds of others. This magician is called the Pope.[42] Sometimes he has the King believing that three are only one,* sometimes that the bread he eats is not bread and the wine he drinks not wine, and a thousand other things of the sort.

And, in order to keep up his second wind and not let the prince lose the habit of believing, this magician occasionally gives him certain articles of faith for exercise. Two years ago, he sent him a great writ, which he called the *Constitution,*[43] and at all costs, wanted to make the prince and all his subjects believe everything that was contained therein. He succeeded with the prince, who submitted immediately and gave a good example to his subjects. But some of them rebelled and said they weren't going to believe a single word of what was in the writ. Women were behind this revolt, which divided the whole court, the whole kingdom, and every family. This Constitution forbids the people to read a book that all the Christians claim was brought down from heaven; it is, properly speaking, their Koran. The women, outraged at this insult to their sex, aroused everyone and everything against the Constitution. They have managed to bring the men around to their side, and in this case, the men do not choose to exercise their prerogative. It must be admitted, all the same, that this mufti does not reason badly, and, by the great Ali, he must have been instructed in the principles of our holy law. For, since women are inferior to us by creation and since our prophets tell us that they

won't enter into paradise, why should they get involved with reading a book that was written solely to teach the way to paradise? [44]

I have heard stories that sound miraculous, told about the King, and I have no doubt you will hesitate to believe them.

They say that while he was making war on his neighbors, all allied against him, he was surrounded in his own kingdom by a countless number of invisible enemies.[45] They add that he had been seeking them out for thirty years and that in spite of the untiring efforts of certain dervishes[46] in his trust, he could not find a single one of them. They are living with him, they are at his court, in his capital city, in his armies, in his law courts, and yet it is said that he will suffer the vexation of dying without having found them out. One might say that they exist in general and yet no longer have any identity in particular. They form a body with no members. No doubt heaven chooses to punish the prince for not having been moderate enough against his conquered enemies, for it provides him with invisible ones whose jinni and destiny are superior to his own.

I shall continue to write to you, and I shall teach you things far removed from Persian character and spirit. It is certainly the same earth carrying both countries, but the men of this country where I am and those of the country where you are are quite different.

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1712.

LETTER XXV*

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna

I have received a letter from your nephew, Rhedi. He writes to me that he is leaving Smyrna with the intention of seeing Italy and that the sole aim of his trip is to learn more and thus become more worthy of you. I congratulate you upon having a nephew who will one day be the comfort of your old age.

Rica is writing you a long letter. He told me that he spoke at length to you about this country. His alertness of

mind permits him to grasp everything rapidly. As for me, since I think more slowly, I am in no condition to tell you anything.

You are the subject of our most touching conversations; we cannot say enough about the welcome you gave us at Smyrna and the helpfulness still rendered to us each day by your friendship.

May you always, my generous Ibben, find friends everywhere as grateful and faithful as ourselves! May I see you again soon and rediscover those happy days passed so sweetly between two friends.

Farewell.

From Paris, the 4th of the Moon of Rebiab II, 1712.

LETTER XXVI

Usbek to Roxane in the seraglio at Ispahan

How fortunate you are, Roxane, to be in the gentle country of Persia and not in these poisonous climes where decency and virtue are unknown! How happy for you! You dwell in my seraglio as in a continuing state of innocence, far from the reaches of all human beings. You are in a joyful state of happy inability to transgress: no man has ever soiled you with his lascivious regard. Even your father-in-law, in the relaxed freedom of banquets, has not seen your lovely mouth. You have never forgotten to attach the holy band that conceals it. O happy Roxane! Whenever you go to the country, you have always had eunuchs to walk ahead of you and reduce to death all such insolent ones as fail to avoid sight of you. And I myself, to whom heaven has vouchsafed you for my happiness, what great difficulty I had to take possession of that treasure you defended so steadfastly! What frustration for me in the first days of our marriage, what vexation not to see you! And what impatience when I had seen you! Yet you did not satisfy that impatience; on the contrary, you provoked it all the more by an obstinate refusal occasioned by alarmed chastity. You confused me with all those other men from whom you constantly conceal your person. Do you remember the day when I lost sight of you among

your treacherous slaves as they whisked you away from my pursuit? Do you remember that other day, when seeing the powerlessness of your tears, you used your mother's authority to put a halt to the fury of my love? Do you remember how, when all other resource failed you, you fell back on the resources of your courage? You seized a dagger and threatened to immolate the husband who loved you if he continued to demand of you what you cherished more than that husband himself. Two months went by in this battle of love and virtue.[47] You pushed your chaste scruples too far; you did not surrender even after you had been vanquished. You defended to the last moment your expiring virginity. You looked upon me as an enemy who had outraged you and not as a husband who had loved you. You were three months without being able to look upon me unblushingly. Your uneasy expression seemed to reproach me for the advantage I had taken. Not even my moments of possession were calm. You withheld from me all you could of your charms and graces, and I was intoxicated with the greatest favors without ever having obtained the lesser.

If you had been educated in this country, you would not have been so troubled; women here have lost all reserve. They appear before men with faces uncovered, as if they sought to request their own downfall. They seek them out with their glances; they see them in the mosques, on their walks, and even in their homes. The usage of having eunuchs for servants is unknown to them. In place of that noble simplicity and lovable modesty which reigns among you, there is to be seen here a brutish impudence to which it is impossible to grow accustomed.

Yes, my Roxane, if you were here, you would feel outraged by the frightful shamelessness into which your sex has slipped. You would flee these abominable places; you would sigh with regret for that sweet retreat where you meet with innocence, where you are sure of yourself, where no danger causes you to tremble, where, finally, you can love me without any fear of ever losing the love you owe me.

When you enhance the beauty of your complexion with the most beautiful of colors, when you perfume your whole body with the most precious of essences, when you embellish yourself in your finest raiment, when you seek

to make yourself stand out from your companions by the grace of your dancing or the sweetness of your voice, when you gracefully vie with them in charm, gentleness, and sprightliness—I cannot imagine that you have any other motive save that of pleasing me. And when I see you blush modestly, when your eyes seek mine, when you steal your way into my heart with your sweet and flattering words, then, Roxane, I could not possibly doubt your love.

But what must I think of European women? The art of caring for their complexion, the finery in which they dress, the pains they take with their person, this continual desire to please that possesses them—all these are so many blemishes to their virtue, and insults to their husbands.

It is not that I believe, Roxane, that these women push their outrageous enterprise as far as such conduct might lead one to think; I doubt that they carry debauch to the horrible excess—which strikes terror in the heart—of completely violating conjugal fidelity. There are certainly few women so abandoned as to go that far.* They all carry graven within their hearts a certain image of virtue, given by birth, weakened by worldly education, but not destroyed by it.[48] They may quite possibly relax the superficial duties that decency demands. But when it comes to taking the last step, nature revolts. Thus when we shut you away so tightly and have you guarded by slaves, when we interfere so powerfully with your desires should they soar too far, it is not because we fear any final infidelity. But we know that purity can never be too great and that the least stain can corrupt it.

I pity you, Roxane. Your chastity, for so long put to the test, deserved a husband who would never have left you and who could personally repress those desires that now only your virtue manages to subjugate.

From Paris, the 7th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1712.

LETTER XXVII

Usbek to Nessir in Ispahan

We are now in Paris, that superb rival to the City of the Sun.[49]

When I left Smyrna, I charged my friend Ibben with delivering into your hands a box containing several presents for you. You will receive this letter by the same channel. Although removed from him by five or six hundred leagues, I send him news of myself and I receive news of him as easily as if he were in Ispahan and I in Qum. I send my letters to Marseilles, whence vessels leave regularly for Smyrna. From there he sends those destined for Persia by Armenian caravans leaving every day for Ispahan.

Rica is enjoying perfect health. The strength of his constitution, his youth, and his natural gaiety allow him to take any ordeal in his stride.

But, as for me, my health is not good. My body and my mind are depressed. I surrender myself to reflections that grow sadder with each day. My health, which grows weaker, turns me toward my own country and makes this country ever more foreign to me.

However, my dear Nessir, see to it that my women do not learn of the state I am in. If they love me, I want to spare their tears. If they do not love me, I do not wish to increase their boldness in any way.

If my eunuchs believed me in danger and could hope for the impunity of weak complaisance on my part, they would soon cease to be deaf to the flattering voice of that sex which extracts a hearing from rocks and stirs even inanimate objects.

Farewell, Nessir. I take pleasure in sending you tokens of my confidence in you.

From Paris, the 5th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1712.

LETTER XXVIII

Rica to ——

I saw yesterday a rather strange thing, even though it happens daily in Paris.

Toward the end of an afternoon, all the people come together and proceed to play a sort of scene that I heard called *comedy*. The movement takes place on a platform, which they call the *stage*. To the two sides of this can be seen, in little alcoves called *loges*, men and women who

are playing mute scenes almost like those that are the custom in our own Persia.

Here, there is a woman in the throes of love, expressing her languor; there, another,* more lively, consumes with her eyes a lover who looks at her in the same way. Every passion is imprinted on these faces and expressed with an eloquence no whit less animated for being mute. Over there, actresses appear in heavy décolleté, carrying usually a muff, out of modesty, to hide their arms. Below stands a crowd of people who poke fun at those upon the stage, while these laugh in their turn at the people below.

However, those who take the greatest pains are certain people chosen for the role at a tender age, so as to bear up under the strain. They are obliged to be everywhere at once. They pass from place to place by paths they alone know; they climb with astounding skill from floor to floor. They are up, they are down—in all the loges. They dive, so to speak, and seem lost; then they reappear. Often they leave one stage to go play on another. There are even some of them, by a miracle you wouldn't dare hope for from their crutches,[50] who can be seen walking and getting about like the others. Finally everyone goes to rooms where an intimate comedy is played. It starts with bows and reverences and continues with embraces. It is said that the flimsiest acquaintance gives a man the right practically to stifle another. The environment seems to encourage affection. And, in sooth, it is said that the princesses reigning there are not at all cruel, and if you discount two or three hours out of the day when they are rather unsociable, it can be said that the rest of the time they are amenable and that the difficult moments are an intoxication that leaves them easily.

Everything I have told you so far takes place in almost the same way in another place, called the *opera*. The only difference is that in one place they talk and in the other they sing. The other day, one of my friends took me into a loge where one of the leading actresses was undressing. We struck up such a close acquaintance that, the next day, I received from her the following letter:

Monsieur,

I am the most unhappy girl in the world. I have always been the most virtuous actress at the opera. Seven or eight months ago I was in the loge where you

saw me yesterday. As I was in the midst of dressing for the role of a priestess of Diana, a young abbé came into me, and with no respect for my white costume, veil, and headband, ravished me of my innocence. I stress the sacrifice I made for him as much as I can; he only starts to laugh and points out that he found me most profane. Meanwhile, I have grown so pregnant that I scarcely dare appear any more on the stage, for, as to the whole question of honor, I am of unbelievable delicacy and have always held that a young lady of good birth can be brought to lose her virtue more easily than her decorum. With such delicacy of feeling, you can be sure that the young abbé would never have succeeded if he had not promised to marry me. Such a legitimate motive made me pass over the usual minor formalities and start where I should have finished. Now, however, since his faithlessness has dishonored me, I wish no longer to live at the opera, where, between you and me, I am barely given enough to live on; for now, when I am no longer young and am losing out in the matter of charms, my annuity, which remains the same, seems to grow smaller every day. I have learned, through a gentleman in your entourage, that much is made in your country of a good dancer and that if I were in Ispahan, my fortune would be quickly made. If you were to be willing to accord your protection to me and take me with you into your country, you would have the distinct advantage of performing a kindness to a girl who by reason of her virtue and decorous conduct, would not make herself unworthy of your favors. I am, sir . . .[51]

From Paris, the 2nd of the
Moon of Shalval, 1712.

LETTER XXIX

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

The Pope is the head of the Christians. He is an old idol worshipped out of habit. Formerly he was to be feared even by kings, for he deposed them as easily as our magnificent sultans depose the kings of Imirette and Georgia.[52] But now he is no longer feared. He claims that he is the successor of one of the first Christians, who is called Saint Peter, and his is most certainly a rich succession, for he has immense treasures and a great country under his domination.[53]

Bishops are lawyers subordinate to him, and they have, under his authority, two quite different functions. When they are assembled together they create, as does he, articles of faith. When they are acting individually they have scarcely any other function except to give dispensation from fulfilling the law. For you must know that the Christian religion is weighed down with an infinity of very difficult practices. And since it has been decided that it is less easy to fulfill these duties than to have bishops around who can dispense with them, this last alternative was chosen out of a sense of common good. In this way, if you don't wish to keep Ramadan, if you don't choose to be subjected to the formalities of marriage, if you wish to break your vows, if you would like to marry in contravention of the prohibitions of the law, even sometimes if you want to break a sworn oath—you go to the bishop or the Pope and you are given immediate dispensation.

Bishops do not create articles of faith by their own decision. There are countless doctors, most of them dervishes, who introduce among themselves thousands of new questions touching upon religion. They are allowed to dispute at great length, and the war goes on until a decision comes along to finish it.

And thus I can assure you that there never has been a kingdom where there are so many civil wars as in the Kingdom of Christ.

Those who propose some new proposition are called at first *heretics*. Each heresy has its own name, and this name becomes for those who are involved, something like a rallying cry. But no one has to be a heretic. One needs only split the difference in half and give some distinction[54] to those who make accusations of heresy, and whatever the distinction—logical or not—it makes a man white as snow, and he may have himself called *orthodox*.

What I am telling you is valid for France and Germany,* for I have heard it said that in Spain and Portugal there are certain dervishes who stand for no nonsense and will have a man burned as if he were straw. When people fall into the hands of those fellows, happy is he who has always prayed to God with little wooden beads in his hand, who has worn on his person two strips of cloth attached to two ribbons, or who has at some time been

in a province called Galicia.[55] Without that, the poor devil is in bad straits. Even should he swear like a pagan that he is orthodox, they might quite possibly disagree with him on his qualifications and burn him for a heretic. He could talk all he likes of distinctions to be made—there is no distinction, for he would be in ashes before they even considered listening to him.

Other judges assume that an accused man is innocent until proved guilty; these judges always assume him guilty. When in doubt, they have as their rule always to decide on the side of severity, apparently because they believe men to be bad. But then, from another point of view, they have such a good opinion of men that they never judge them capable of lying, for they receive the testimony of professed enemies, of women of evil repute, of those who ply an infamous profession. In their sentences they include a little compliment for those clad in the brimstone shirt by telling them that they are very vexed to see them so badly dressed, that they as judges are gentle people and abhor blood and are truly grieved to have condemned them. However, to console their grief, they confiscate all the property of these wretches to their own advantage.[56]

Happy the land inhabited by the sons of the prophets! These sad spectacles are unknown there.[57] The holy religion brought to that land by the angels is protected by its very truth; it needs none of these violent means to preserve itself.

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1712.

LETTER XXX

Rica to the same in Smyrna

The inhabitants of Paris are curious to the point of extravagance. When I arrived, they looked upon me as if I had been sent from heaven: old men, young men, women, children—they all wanted to see me. Whenever I went out, everybody appeared at the windows. If I were in the Tuileries, I would see a group circle about me immediately: the women formed a rainbow, shaded through a thousand colors, as they surrounded me. If I were to go

to the theater, I would immediately find a hundred lorgnettes turned on me. In short, no man was ever more looked at than myself. I would sometimes smile to hear people who had practically never strayed from their rooms say among themselves: "You must admit that he looks very Persian." What an admirable business! I found portraits of myself everywhere; I saw myself multiplied in every shop, on every mantel. So frightened were they not to have their fill of seeing enough of me.

So much honor cannot go long without becoming a burden. I did not think of myself as being such a curious and rare man, and however good the opinion I may have of myself, I should never have imagined that I was to upset the tranquillity of a big city where I was totally unknown. All this made me decide to put off the Persian costume and change over to one in European style, just to see if there would remain anything admirable in my face. That test made me understand what I was really worth. Free of all foreign embellishment, I found that I was more soberly judged. I had every reason to complain of my tailor, who in one moment, made me lose the attentions of public esteem, for I immediately fell into a frightful void. I could stay sometimes for a whole hour in a social gathering without being looked at, without being given any occasion to open my mouth. But if, by chance, someone in the group learned that I was Persian, I would immediately hear a humming all about me: "Ah, ah! So Monsieur is a Persian? What an extraordinary thing! How can anyone be a Persian?" [58]

From Paris, the 6th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1712.

LETTER XXXI

Rhedi to Usbek

For the present, my dear Usbek, I am in Venice. A man could have seen all the cities in the world and still be surprised upon arriving in Venice. It will always be a surprise to see a city and its towers and mosques rising from beneath the water and to look upon masses of people in a place where there should be only fish.[59]

But this worldly city lacks the most precious treasure in the world—I mean fresh water. It is impossible to accomplish a single legal ablution here. This city is an abomination to our Holy Prophet and he looks down upon it from heaven with nothing but rage.

If it were not for that, my dear Usbek, I should be delighted to live in a city where my mind is developing every day. I am ferreting out for myself secrets of commerce; I learn about the motives of princes and the form of their government. I do not even neglect popular European superstitions. I apply myself to medicine, physics, and astronomy, and I am studying the arts. In short, I am beginning to come out from behind the clouds that covered my eyes in the land of my birth.

From Venice, the 16th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1712.

LETTER XXXII *

Rica to ——

The other day I went to see a home[60] where some three hundred persons are being rather poorly cared for. The visit did not take long, for the church and the buildings are not worth looking at. The inmates of the place are rather gay; several of them were playing cards or other games I didn't recognize at all. As I was leaving, one of these men left too, and having heard me ask the road to the Marais,[61] the most outlying section of Paris, he said: "I am going there, and I shall take you along; follow me." He led me beautifully, extricated me from all the bottlenecks, and cleverly saved me from carriages and carts. We were about to arrive at our goal when curiosity got the better of me.

"My good friend," I asked, "couldn't I find out who you are?"

"I am a blind man, sir," he replied.

"What! you are blind!" I exclaimed. "Why then didn't you ask that good man playing cards with you to bring us here?"

"He is blind, too," he replied. "For four hundred years now, three hundred of us blind men have been living in that home where you saw me. But I must leave you. There

is the street you were looking for. I am going into the crowd, into that church there. And I assure you I shall embarrass people more than they embarrass me." [62]

From Paris, the 17th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1712.

LETTER XXXIII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Wine is so expensive in Paris, by reason of all the taxes put on it, that it would seem likely the authorities have undertaken to carry out the precept of the divine Koran, which forbids drinking.[63]

When I think of all the deadly effects of that liquor, I cannot but consider it the most dreadful gift Nature ever made to man. If anything has dishonored the life and reputation of our monarchs, it has been their intemperance. It is the most envenomed source of their injustice and cruelty.[64]

I shall dare to say it to the shame of mankind: the law forbids the use of wine to our princes, and yet they drink it to an excess that debases them lower than humanity itself. The use of wine is, on the contrary, permissible to Christian princes, and it cannot be noticed that it does them any harm. The human mind is contradiction personified: in licentious debauch, people rebel with fury against precept, and the law, established to make us more virtuous, often serves only to make us more blameworthy.

However, if I disapprove of the use of the sort of liquor that causes loss of reason, I do not condemn in the same way drinks that brighten it up. It is Oriental wisdom to search out remedies against melancholy with as much care as those against the most dangerous diseases. When some misfortune strikes a European, he has no other resource save to read a philosopher called Seneca. But the Asiatics are more reasonable and better physicians in that quarter, and they take brews capable of making a man gay and of charming away the memory of his afflictions.[65]

Nothing can be more distressing than consolation drawn from the necessity of evil, the futility of all remedy, the fatality of destiny, the order of providence, and the sad plight of the human lot.[66] It is ridiculous to try to atten-

uate evil by considering that we are born miserable. Better to lift the spirit above its own reflections and treat a man as a sentient rather than as a rational being.

The soul, united as it is to the body, is forever the victim of its tyranny. If the blood flows too lethargically, if the humors are not sufficiently purified, if they do not exist in sufficient quantity, we fall into depression and melancholy. But if we swallow brews capable of changing the disposition of our body, our soul becomes once more capable of receiving cheering impressions, and it experiences a secret pleasure at seeing its machinery recover, so to speak, its movement and its life.

From Paris, the 25th of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1713.

LETTER XXXIV

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna*

Persian women are more beautiful than those of France, but French women are prettier. Impossible not to love the former, and equally impossible not to be happy with the latter. The first are more gentle and more modest; the others are gayer and more sprightly.

What keeps the bloodline so handsome in Persia is the orderly life led by women there. They neither gamble nor stay up late; they drink no wine and are practically never exposed to the air. One must admit that the seraglio is made more for hygiene than for pleasure. It is a uniform existence, without excitement. Everything smells of obedience and duty. Even the pleasures taken there are sober, and the joys severe, and they are practically never relished except as manifestations of authority and subservience.

Even the men in Persia lack the gaiety of Frenchmen.[67] You simply cannot find there the freedom of mind and the complacent attitude that I see here in every rank and profession.

It is even worse in Turkey, where families could be found in which, from father to son, no one has laughed since the foundation of the monarchy.

This Asiatic sobriety derives from the dearth of intercourse between people. They see each other only when forced to do so by ceremony. Friendship, that sweet bond

of hearts which creates a gentleness of existence here, is practically unknown to them. They withdraw to their houses where they always find a social company awaiting them, so that each family group lives, so to speak, in isolation.

One day when I was discussing these things with a man of this country, he said to me: "What shocks me most in your way of life is that you are forced to live with slaves whose hearts and minds always reflect the baseness of their social position. These cowardly people weaken in you feelings of virtue which stem from nature, and they have been destroying such feelings in you since the very childhood they tyrannize.

"For you must eventually cast off your prejudices. What can a man hope for from an education received at the hands of a miserable fellow whose whole honor consists in guarding the women of another man, and who prides himself on having the basest position one can hold among humankind? A man who is to be scorned for his very loyalty (his sole virtue) because he is brought to that loyalty by envy, jealousy, and despair? A man who, burning to avenge himself on the two sexes from which he is an outcast, consents to the tyranny of the stronger so long as he can harass the weaker; who, drawing the whole renown of his calling from his own imperfection, ugliness, and deformity, is held in esteem only because he does not deserve to be? A man, finally, who, forever chained to the door to which his duty attaches him, is harder than the hinges and bolts that hold it up, and who dares boast of his fifty years of life in such an unworthy post, during which, while responsible to his master's jealousy, he has exercised his utter baseness?"

From Paris, the 14th of the
Moon of Zilhage, 1713.

LETTER XXXV

Usbek to Jasheed, his cousin, dervish at the shining monastery of Tabriz

What thinkest thou of Christians, sublime dervish? Dost thou believe that, at the Judgment Day, they will be like the infidel Turks, who will be used as asses for riding off

the Jews to hell at a trot? [68] I am quite aware that they will certainly not go to the sojourn of the prophets, and that the great Ali never came for them. But just because they were not fortunate enough to find proper mosques in their own countries, dost think they will be condemned to eternal punishment and that God will chastise them for not practicing a religion he did not make known unto them? [69] I can tell thee I have many times examined these Christians, I have questioned to see if they had some idea of the great Ali, the most beautiful among men. I discovered that they had never even heard him mentioned.

They do not at all resemble the infidels whom our saints caused to pass under the sword's edge because they refused to believe in the miracles of heaven. They are more like those unfortunate people who lived within the shadow of idolatry before the divine light came to illumine the face of our great Prophet.

Moreover, if thou but examine their religion closely, thou canst find there in seed, as it were, our dogmas.[70] I have often admired the secrets of providence, which seems thereby to have wished to prepare them all for a general conversion. I have heard talk about a book of their own doctors, called *Polygamy Triumphant,*[71] in which it is shown that polygamy is enjoined upon Christians. Their baptism is the very image of our legal ablutions, and the Christians err only in the efficacity they grant to this first ablution, which, they believe, suffices for all the others. Their priests and their monks, like ourselves, pray seven times a day.[72] They hope to enjoy a paradise where they will partake of a thousand delights by means of the resurrection of the body. Like ourselves, they have set aside days for fasting and mortification of the flesh, by which they hope to sway divine mercy. They offer up worship to the good angels and shun the evil ones. They possess a blessed credulity for miracles performed by God through the ministry of his servants. Like ourselves, they admit to the insufficiency of their good works and to the need they feel for an intercessor in the presence of God.[73] I can see Mohammedanism everywhere, although I cannot find Mohammed here at all. Do what you will, Truth will out and will ever pierce the shadows that surround her. The day will come when the Eternal will see upon the face of the Earth only true believers. Time, which consumes

all, will destroy the very errors themselves. All men will be surprised to find themselves under the same standard. Everything, including the law, will be fulfilled. The divine exemplars will be lifted up from the earth and carried off to the celestial archives.

From Paris, the 20th of the Moon of Zilhage, 1713.

LETTER XXXVI [74]

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Coffee is very popular in Paris. There are a great number of public houses where it is served. In some of these houses news is reported; in others, chess is played. There is one of them[75] where the coffee is prepared in such a way as to give wit to those who drink it. At least, of all the people who come out of that place there is no man who does not think that he has four times more than when he went in.

What shocks me, however, in these wits is that they do not make themselves useful to their country and that they exercise their talents in puerile things. For example, when I arrived in Paris I found them warmed up over a dispute that couldn't imaginably have been slighter. The whole matter revolved about the reputation of an old Greek poet: for the past two thousand years no one has even been sure of his country or of the date of his death.[76] Both sides admitted that he was an excellent poet; the real question was precisely what degree of excellence should be assigned to him. Everybody wanted to give the final assessment, but among those distributors of reputation, some had more weight on their side than others. And the quarrel started! It was most animated, for, on both sides, such vulgar insults were made and such bitter jests exchanged so cordially that I admired the manner of disputing no less than the subject. "If anyone," I said to myself, "were to be so rash as to approach one of this Greek poet's defenders and to attack the reputation of some honest citizen, he would be soundly rebuked, for I believe that such delicate zeal for the reputation of the dead would flare up nicely to defend that of a living man. However that may be," I added, "God forbid that I

should ever draw on my head the enmity of the censors of this poet whom two thousand years in the tomb has not spared from such implacable hate! As things now stand, they are striking out emptily into the air. But what would be their fury if it were fanned by the living presence of their enemy?"

The people I have just spoken to you about discuss in the vulgar tongue, and they must be distinguished from another sort of disputants, who use a foreign tongue[77] that appears to add something to the fury and obstinacy of the combatants. There are some quarters where they draw sustenance from drawing distinctions; they live from obscure reasoning and false conclusions. This profession, in which you might really suppose people would die of hunger, is far from nonlucrative. Members of an entire nation, expelled from their country, have been observed to cross the seas to settle in France, bringing with them for provision against the necessities of life, nothing except a fearful talent for dispute.[78]

Farewell.

From Paris, the last of the
Moon of Zilhage, 1713.

LETTER XXXVII

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna

The King of France is old. We have no example in our history books of a monarch who has reigned so long. It is said that he possesses a high degree of talent for making himself obeyed. He governs with equal talent his family, his court, and his state. People have often heard him say that, of all the governments in the world, that of the Turks, or that of our august sultan would please him best—so much significance does he attach to Oriental politics.

I have studied his character and I find in it contradictions impossible for me to resolve. For example, he has a minister who is only eighteen years old, and a mistress who is eighty.[79] He loves his religion, and yet he cannot stand those who say that religion should be observed to the last letter.[80] Although he flees the tumult of cities and is not very communicative, still he is concerned from

morning to night only with having himself talked about. He likes triumphs and victories but he is just as afraid of having a good general at the head of his own troops as he would be to have him at the head of an enemy army. To be at once weighed down with more riches than any prince could hope for and cursed with poverty that an individual could not support, has happened, I believe, only to him.

He likes to reward those who serve him, yet he pays just as liberally for the constant attendance, or rather, the idleness of his courtiers as for the hard-fought campaigns of his captains. Often he shows preferment to a man who undresses him or who hands him his napkin when he sits down to table over some other who takes cities for him and wins battles. He does not feel that sovereign grandeur should be bothered with the doling out of favors, and without ever inquiring whether the man he showers with wealth is deserving, believes that his choosing him will make him so. Thus, he has been known to give a small pension to a man who fled two leagues in battle and a handsome governorship to another who fled four.

He is magnificent, particularly in his buildings. There are more statues in the gardens of his palace than there are citizens in a big city. His personal guard is as strong as the guard of that prince before whom all thrones topple.[81] His armies are just as large, his resources just as great, and his finances just as limitless.[82]

From Paris, the 7th of the Moon of Maharram, 1713.

LETTER XXXVIII

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

It is a great question among males to know whether it is better to deprive a woman of her freedom or let her keep it. It seems to me there are many things to be said for and against. If the Europeans can say it is no mark of nobility to make the persons we love miserable, our Asiatics can answer that there is a certain baseness involved in a man's renouncing the dominion over women given him by nature. If they are told that the great number of women shut up by them is embarrassing, they can reply that ten women

who obey are less embarrassing than one who does not. Let them object in their turn that Europeans could not possibly be happy with women who are not faithful to them, it could be countered that their much-boasted fidelity does not obviate the disgust that always follows on the satisfaction of the passions, that our women belong too strictly to us, that such calm possession leaves us nothing to desire or fear, and that a bit of coquetry is the salt that adds savor and prevents corruption. A wiser man than myself might find it difficult to decide the issue, for if the Asiatics do* well to seek means aimed at calming their uneasiness, the Europeans do well not to have any uneasiness at all.

"After all," they say, "even were we to be unhappy in our status as husbands, we should always find some way of making up for it in our status as lovers. To enable a man to complain with justification of his wife's infidelity, there would have to be only three persons in the world. Things will always be evened out when there are four." [83]

It is quite another question to know whether the natural law subjects women to men. "No," a philosopher with a great penchant for the ladies[84] told me the other day. "Nature never dictated such a law. The dominion we hold over them is a veritable tyranny. They have allowed us to hold it only because they are more gentle than we are, and consequently, possess more humanity than reason. These advantages over us, which ought no doubt to have secured superiority for them if we had been reasonable, have made them lose it because we are not.

"Now, however, if it is true that we have only a tyrannical power over women, it is no less true that they possess a natural dominion over us—their beauty, which is irresistible. Our domination is not the fact in every country, but the domination of beauty is universal. Why, then, should we have any advantage? Is it because we are the stronger? But that would make it a true injustice. We use all manner of means to humble their courage. Their strength would be equal if their education were also equal. Let us put them to the test in the matter of talents not enfeebled by their present education, and we shall soon see if we are so strong."

We must admit it even though it shocks our way of life: among more refined peoples women have always had

authority over their husbands. It was established by law with the Egyptians, in honor of Isis; and with the Babylonians, in honor of Semiramis. It was said of the Romans that they commanded all nations but that they obeyed their wives. I do not even mention the Sarmatians, who were bound in veritable servitude to that sex. They were too barbarous to justify my citing their example.

You can see, my dear Ibben, that I have developed a taste for this country where people like to argue extraordinary opinions and reduce everything to paradox. The Prophet has decided the question and laid down the rights of both sexes. "Wives," he said, "should honor their husbands. Husbands should honor wives, but they have the advantage of one degree over them." [85]

From Paris, the 26th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1713.

LETTER XXXIX

Hadji[86] *Ibbi to the Jew, Ben Joshua, Mohammedan convert in Smyrna*

It seems to me, Ben Joshua, that there are always bright portents to prepare the way for the birth of extraordinary men, as if nature were undergoing a kind of crisis and the celestial power were bringing forth only with great effort

There is nothing so miraculous as the birth of Mohammed. God, who by the decrees of his providence, had from the beginning resolved to send unto mankind that great prophet to enchain Satan, created a light two thousand years before Adam; and this light, passing from one elect to the next, from ancestor to ancestor of Mohammed, came down to him as authentic testimony that he was descended from the Patriarchs.

It was because of this same prophet that God wanted no child to be conceived unless the woman* should cease to be unclean and the man* be delivered over to circumcision.

He came into the world circumcised, and joy appeared on his face from birth. Earth trembled thrice, as if she had herself given birth. All the idols bowed down. The thrones of kings were overthrown. Lucifer was hurled into the depths of the sea, and only after swimming for forty

days, did he issue forth from the abyss and climb Mount Gabes, whence, with a terrible voice, he called on the angels.

That night, God placed a barrier between man and woman which none of them could pass over. The art of necromancers and magicians was without avail. A voice was heard from heaven, saying these words: "I have sent forth to the world my faithful friend."

According to the testimony of Isben Aben, Arab historian, the generations of birds, clouds, winds, and all the echelons of angels gathered together to rear the child, and they disputed the privilege among themselves. The birds said in their chirping that it was more practical for them to raise him because they could the most easily gather together many fruits from diverse places.

The winds murmured and said: "It is rather for us to do so for we can bring to him from all corners the most pleasant odors."

"No," said the clouds. "To our care he should be entrusted, for we shall continually communicate to him the coolness of the waters."

Thereupon the indignant angels cried out: "What, then, would remain for us to do?"

But a voice from heaven was heard and put an end to all this wrangling. "He shall not be taken from mortal hands, for blessed are the breasts that nurse him, blessed the hands that touch him, and the house where he shall live, and the bed where he shall rest." [87]

After so many brilliant testimonials, my dear Joshua, a man would have to possess a heart of iron not to believe in his holy law. What more could heaven do to authenticate his divine mission short of overturning nature and causing to perish the very men it wished to convince?

From Paris, the 20th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1713.

LETTER XL

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna

As soon as an exalted person dies, people assemble in a mosque, where his funeral oration is delivered. This is a discourse in his praise, and after it is delivered, a man

would be hard put to decide precisely as to the worth of the dead man.

I should like to do away with funerary pomp. Men should be wept over at birth, not at death. What good are all the ceremonies and all the lugubrious paraphernalia that are produced before the dying man in his last moments; what use are all the tears of his family and the pain of his friends if not to exaggerate to him the loss he is about to sustain?

We are so blind that we do not know when we should be sad and when we should rejoice. We almost always experience only false sadness and false joy.

When I see* the Mogul go rather stupidly each year to get into scales and have himself weighed like an ox,[88] when I see his people rejoice because the prince has grown heavier with matter (that is to say, less capable of governing them), I take pity, Ibben, on human folly.

From Paris, the 20th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1713.

LETTER XLI *

The first black eunuch to Usbek

Ismael, one of your black eunuchs, has just died, magnificent lord, and I cannot refrain from replacing him. Since eunuchs are extremely rare at the present time, I had thought of using a black slave that you have in the country. But up until now I have not been able to bring him to allow himself to be consecrated to that office. Since I can see that in the end it is to his advantage, I tried the other day, in concert with the superintendent of your gardens, to use a little severity on him. I ordered that in spite of his feelings, he should be put into the proper condition for performing for you the services closest to your heart and should be prepared for living like myself in those dreadful places that he does not even dare to look at now. But he began to scream as if he were about to be skinned alive and managed so well that he escaped our hands and avoided the fatal knife. I have just learned that he wishes to write to you to ask for mercy, submitting that I conceived this plan only out of an insatiable desire

to avenge myself for certain biting raillery he says he made at my expense. However, I swear to you by the hundred thousand prophets that I have acted only for the good of your service—the only thing dear to me, aside from which, I attach importance to nothing.

I bow prostrate at your feet.

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 7th
of the Moon of Maharram, 1713.

LETTER XLII *

Pharan to Usbek, his sovereign lord

If you were here, magnificent lord, I should appear before you covered all over with white paper, and there would still not be enough of it to write all the insults that most wicked of all men, your first black eunuch, has made at my expense since your departure.

Under the pretext of some jesting he claims I made on the misfortune of his condition, he is calling down on my head a fathomless vengeance. He has aroused against me the cruel overseer of your gardens, who since your departure, has forced me to carry out insurmountable tasks, in doing which I have believed a thousand times that I should lose my life without losing for one moment my eagerness to serve you. How many times have I said to myself: "I have a master full of kindness, and yet I am the most unhappy slave on the face of the earth!"

I confess to you, magnificent lord, that I did not think myself destined for yet greater misfortunes. But that treacherous eunuch wanted to put the finishing touch to his malice. Several days ago, on his own authority, he assigned me to the guarding of your sacred wives—that is to say, to an execution that would be a thousand times more cruel to me than death. Those who at birth have had the misfortune to receive such treatment from their cruel parents are consoled perhaps by the fact that they never knew any other condition save their own. But were I to be degraded from humankind, and deprived of humanity, I should die from grief even if not from that barbarous operation itself.

I kiss your feet, sublime lord, in deep humility. Act in

such a way that I shall feel the effects of your much honored virtue, and let it not be said that by your command there exists one more unhappy man on the face of the earth.

From the gardens of Fatima, the 7th of the Moon of Maharram, 1713.

LETTER XLIII *

Usbek to Pharan in the gardens of Fatima

Receive joy into your heart, and glance upon these sacred written characters with recognition. Cause them to be kissed by the grand eunuch and by the overseer of my gardens. I forbid them to* undertake anything against you. Tell them to purchase the eunuch I need. Acquit yourself of your duty as if you beheld me ever before you, for know that the greater my kindness, the more you shall be punished if you take unfair advantage of it.

From Paris, the 25th of the Moon of Rhegeb, 1713.

LETTER XLIV

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

There are three estates in France: the Church, the Sword, and the Law. Each holds a sovereign scorn for the two others. Such and such a man, for example, who should be held in scorn because he is stupid, is often so held only because he is a man of the robe.

Even the very worst artisan will dispute about the excellence of the art he has chosen. Each man raises himself above those of a different profession as much as befits the idea of superiority he holds for his own profession.

All men resemble, more or less, that woman from the province of Erivan who, having received some favor from one of our monarchs, wished for him a thousand times in the benedictions she bestowed on him, that Heaven make him governor of Erivan.[89]

I have read somewhere in an account, how several men of the crew of a French vessel at anchor off the coast of

Guinea, decided to go ashore and buy some sheep. They were taken to the King, who was under a tree, dispensing justice to his subjects. He was seated on his throne, that is, on a piece of wood, and as proud as if he had been seated on the throne of the Grand Mogul. He had three or four guards with wooden pikes. A parasol in the form of a canopy covered his head from the burning heat of the sun. For embellishment, he and his wife, the Queen, had only their black skin and a few rings. This prince, more vain than pitiful, asked our strangers if there was much talk of him in France. He believed that his name must be echoed from pole to pole, and quite different from that conqueror of whom it has been said that he silenced all the earth,[90] this fellow believed that he should make the entire universe talk.

When the Khan of Tartary has dined, a herald announces that all the princes of the earth may now go to eat if they so please. This barbarian, who partakes only of milk, who has no house, and who lives only from brigandage, considers all the kings of the world as his slaves, and insults them regularly twice a day.

From Paris, the 28th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1713.

LETTER XLV

Rica to Usbek in ——*

Yesterday morning, while I was abed, I heard someone knocking brazenly at my door, which was abruptly either opened or broken in by a man with whom I had some social connection and who seemed completely beside himself.

His dress was much less than modest; his wig, all awry, had not even been combed. He had not taken the time to have his black doublet mended, and for this particular day he had completely given up the wise precautions he usually took in an attempt to disguise the sorry state of his dress.

"Get up," he cried, "I shall need you all day. I have a thousand purchases to make and I shall be much happier to do my shopping with you First we must go to the rue

Saint-Honoré to speak with a notary who is charged with selling an estate of five hundred thousand livres. I want him to give me first choice. On my way here, I stopped a minute in the faubourg Saint-Germain, where I rented a town house at two thousand écus, and I hope to sign the deed today."

As soon as I was dressed, or almost, my man made me hurry downstairs. "Let us begin," he said, "by buying a carriage and choosing the equipment for it." And so we actually bought not only a carriage but on top of that a hundred thousand francs' worth of equipment within the hour. All this process went quickly because my friend never haggled and never counted, and thus did not pay out or transfer any funds.* I was reflecting about all of this, and when I examined the man closely, I found in him such a singular admixture of riches and poverty that I didn't know any more what to think.

Finally, however, I broke the silence, and drawing him aside, I said: "Sir, who is going to pay for all of this?"

"I am," he said.* "Come into my room and I shall show you immense treasures, and riches envied by the greatest monarchs. But they must not cause you envy, for you shall share them with me forever." I follow him. We climb to his sixth floor, and with a ladder, we hoist ourselves up to the seventh, which was a study open on all sides, containing nothing but two or three dozen earthenware basins filled with various liquids.[91] "I got up very early," he said, "and did what I have always done first for the past twenty-five years: visited my project. I saw that the great day, that which would make me the richest man on earth, had come. Do you see that dark red liquid? It contains at this moment all the qualities that the philosophers require for the transmutation of metals. I have drawn off these grains you see here, purest gold in color although a bit imperfect in weight. This secret, which Nicolas Flamel found, but which Raymond Lully[92] and a million others kept looking for, has been transmitted to me, and today I find myself a happy adept. May heaven grant that I make use of all this treasure it has granted me only for its greater glory."

I left and went down to the street, or rather, beside myself with anger, I rushed down those stairs and left this rich man in his poorhouse.

Farewell, my dear Usbek. I shall come to see you tomorrow, and if you like, we shall return to Paris together.

From Paris, the last of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1713.

LETTER XLVI

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

I keep seeing here people who argue endlessly about religion. But at the same time, they seem to be vying with each other as to who shall observe it the least.

They are not only not better Christians, but also not even better citizens, and that's what touches me, for under whatever religion one lives, the observance of laws, love for fellow men, and piety toward one's parents are always the first acts of religion.[93]

In truth, should not the first object of a religious man be to please the divinity who established the religion he professes? The best means of succeeding in this is doubtless to observe the rules of society and the duties of humanity. For under whatever religion a man lives, from the moment that a supposition of religion exists, there must also be the supposition that God loves men, since he established a religion to make them happy, and since if he loves men, men are thus assured of pleasing him by also loving them, that is, by practicing all the duties of charity and human kindness in their behalf and never violating the laws under which they live.

So doing, we are much surer of pleasing God than we are by observing such and such a ceremony. For ceremonies contain no degree of goodness in themselves. They are good only with reference to and in the supposition of the knowledge that God has commanded them. But there is matter here for a long discussion. One can easily be deceived, since he must choose the ceremonies of one religion as over against two thousand.

A man rendered unto God every day this prayer: "Lord, I understand nothing in all these disputes people are ever making about you. I should like to serve you according to your will; but every man whom I consult wants me to

serve you according to his own. When I would lift up my prayer to you, I don't know in what language I should speak to you. Nor do I know what position I should assume: one man says I should pray to you standing; another wants me to be sitting; still another requires that my body be supported by my knees. Nor is that all. There are some who claim that I should wash every morning in cold water and others who hold that you will contemplate me with horror if I don't have a small piece of flesh cut off. The other day I happened to eat a rabbit in a caravansary. Three men nearby made me tremble at my act; all three held that I had grievously offended you: the first[94] because that animal is unclean; the second [95] because it was strangled; and the third [96] because it was not fish. A Brahman who was passing close by and whom I took as judge in the matter told me: 'They are wrong, for apparently you didn't kill the animal yourself.' [97]

"'Oh yes, I did,' I replied.

"'Ah, then you have committed an abominable act for which God will never forgive you,' he said in tones of severity. 'How can you be sure that the soul of your father has not passed into that animal?' [98]

"All these things, Lord, throw me into inconceivable confusion. I dare not shake my head without the danger of offending you. And yet I should like to please you, and toward that end, to use well this life you have granted me. I do not know if I am deceiving myself or not, but I believe that the best way to attain it is to live as a good citizen in the society where you had me born, and as a good father in the family you have given me."

From Paris, the 8th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1713.

LETTER XLVII *

Zachi to Usbek in Paris

I have great news to impart to you: I have become reconciled with Zephis. The harem, once divided between us, is now reunited. Now there is nothing missing from these

halls, where peace reigns, but you yourself. Come back, my dear Usbek, come and make love triumphant here.

I gave a great feast in honor of Zephis; your mother and your wives were invited. Your aunts and several of your lady cousins were also there. They came on horseback, covered with the somber cloud of their dresses and veils.

The following day we left for the country, where we hoped to be more at ease. We got on our camels and arranged ourselves four to each howdah. Since the party had been gotten together at the last minute, we did not have time to have the *courouc*[99] sounded throughout the area. However, the first eunuch, careful as always, took another precaution, for he added to the drapery that prevented us from being seen, a curtain so thick that we were able to see absolutely no one.

When we arrived at the river that must be crossed, each of us, as is the custom, got into a box and was carried onto the boat, for we were told that the river was full of people. A curious man who came too close to our place of enclosure received a mortal blow, separating him forever from the light of day. Another, who was bathing naked on the banks, suffered the same fate. Your faithful eunuchs sacrificed those two wretches to your honor and our own.

But listen to the rest of our adventures. When we were in the middle of the river, such a violent wind came up and such a frightful cloud hung in the air that our sailors began to despair. Frightened by this danger, almost all of us fainted. I remember hearing the voices and the discussions of our eunuchs, some of whom said that we must be warned of the peril and taken from our prison. But their chief held that he would rather die than allow his master to be thus dishonored and that he would bury a dagger in the breast of any who made such daring suggestions. One of my slaves, completely beside herself, came running toward me, undressed, in order to help me, but a black eunuch seized her roughly and made her go back into the place she had come from. At that point I fainted; I regained consciousness only after the danger was past.

How cumbersome it is for women to travel! Men are exposed only to dangers that threaten their lives, while

we spend every moment in fear of losing either life, or virtue.

Farewell, my dear Usbek. I shall always adore you.

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 2nd of the Moon of Ramadan, 1713.

LETTER XLVIII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Those who like to learn are never idle. Although I am occupied with no important affair, I am nonetheless continually busy. I spend my life examining. In the evening, I write what I have noticed, seen, or heard during the day. Everything interests me; everything astonishes me. I am like a child whose still sensitive organs are keenly struck by the most insignificant objects.[100]

You will not believe it perhaps, but we are pleasantly received into all companies and social circles; I think I owe much on this score to Rica's lively wit and natural gaiety, which make him seek out everybody and be sought after in his turn. Our foreign air no longer offends anybody. We are now enjoying the surprise of watching Frenchmen discover that we do have some manners, for they cannot imagine that our climate should produce men. Still, I must admit that they merit our efforts to undeceive them.

I have just spent several days in a country house near Paris, the home of an important man who is delighted to have company there. He has a very likable wife, who combines with great decorum a certain gaiety that life in retirement always robs from our ladies in Persia.

Foreigner that I am, I found nothing better to do than to study* the crowd of people who come there endlessly and who* always have something new to offer me. I noticed first a man whose simplicity charmed me. I grew attached to him, and he to me, so that we found ourselves continually together.

One day, in a large group, we were conversing privately, leaving the general conversation go by. "You will probably find in me," I said to him, "more curiosity than good manners, but I beg you to permit me to ask a few

questions, for I am annoyed at being left out of everything and of living among people I cannot possibly single out one from the other. My mind has been working for two days. There is not a single one of those men who has not put me two hundred times to torture; I could never understand them in a thousand years. They remain more invisible to me than the wives of our great monarch."

"You have only to speak," he replied, "and I shall teach you all you want to know, particularly as I think you are a discreet man and will not take advantage of my confidence."

"Who is that man," I asked, "who has talked so much to us about the meals he has fed to the great, who is so intimate with dukes, and who speaks so often to your ministers even though, as I am told, they are difficult to get to know? He must certainly be a man of good family, but he has such a common face that he does little honor to the well-born, and what's more, I find him totally lacking in education. I am a foreigner, but it does seem to me that there is a code of manners, common in general to all nations. And I cannot find them in him. Are your upper classes less well-bred than the others?"

"That man," he replied, laughing, "is a tax farmer.[101] He is just as much superior to others in wealth as he is beneath everyone by birth. He would have the best table in Paris if he could bring himself never to eat at home.[102] He is extremely impertinent, as you can see, but he excels through his cook. Nor is he ungrateful, for you have heard how he praised that servant all day today."

"And the fat man dressed in black," I said to him, "whom that lady arranged to have seated near her—how does it come about that he wears such lugubrious clothes with such a gay manner and such a ruddy complexion? He smiles graciously as soon as he is addressed. His attire is more sober but more carefully arranged than that of your women."

"He is a preacher," was the reply, "and what is worse, a personal confessor. Such a man as you see there knows more about his women than their husbands. He understands the women's weakness, and they know he has one too."

"How's that?" I exclaimed. "Why, he is always talking of something he calls grace."

"No, not always," he replied. "Into the ear of a lovely lady he speaks more willingly of her fall. He thunders in public, but he is as gentle as a lamb in private."

"It appears to me," I said, "that he is much honored and the people have great respect for him."

"What? Much honored? Why, he's a necessary man. He is the joy of life in retirement: little bits of advice, obliging attentions, regular visits. He can get rid of a headache quicker than a layman. He is excellent."

"But if I am not bothering you, tell me who is that man across from us who is so badly dressed, makes facial contortions from time to time, uses a language different from other people, has no wit for speaking, but yet speaks to show wit?"

"He is a poet," he replied, "and a caricature of the human species. People like him say they are born what they are. That is true, and also what they are going to be the rest of their lives, which is to say almost always the most ridiculous of men. Naturally, they are never spared; scorn is poured on them in full measure. Hunger made that particular fellow enter this house, where he is well treated by the master and mistress, whose kindness and politeness cannot be belied by any man. He wrote their epithalamium when they married. That's the best thing he has ever done in his life, for it has turned out that the marriage is just as happy as he predicted.

"Perhaps you would not believe it, filled as you are with Oriental prejudice," he added, "but among us there are happy marriages, and there are women whose strict guardian is their virtue. The people we are talking about enjoy with each other an unshakable peace of mind; they are liked and respected by everyone. There is only one thing wrong: their natural kindness forces them to invite all sorts of people, which sometimes produces a bad company at their house. Not that I disapprove of them. We must live with people as they come. People of whom it is said that they are the best of company are often only those whose vices are more refined. Perhaps it is with them as with poisons, for the most subtle are also the most dangerous."

"And that old man who seems so gloomy?" I said to him in a low voice. "At first I took him for a foreigner,

for besides the fact that he dresses differently from the others, he finds fault with everything in France and criticizes your government."

"He is an old warrior," was the reply, "who makes himself memorable to all his listeners by the prolixity of his exploits. He cannot admit that France has won any battles where he was not present, cannot accept any boasting about a siege where he did not mount the trenches. He believes himself to be so necessary to our history that he imagines history stopped where he stopped. He considers the several wounds he received as if they spelled the dissolution of the monarchy, and unlike those philosophers who say that one can enjoy only the present moment and that the past is nothing, he enjoys only the past and exists only in the campaigns he has fought. He breathes in times past just as heroes are supposed to live in times to come after them."

"Then why," I asked, "did he leave the service?"

"He didn't *leave* it at all," he replied. "Rather the service left him. He has been used in a small fortification, where he will go on retelling his adventures the rest of his days, but he will never go further. The road to honors is closed to him."

"Why so?" I asked.

"We have a rule of thumb in France," he replied, "and that is never to promote officers whose patience has languished in subordinate posts. We think of them as of people whose minds have shrunken into details, and who through the habit of little things, have become incapable of greater ones. We believe that a man who does not have the qualities of a general at the age of thirty will never have them; and that the man without an all-encompassing glance that immediately recognizes a terrain of several leagues in all its different positions, without that presence of mind which allows him to use all his advantages in a victory and all his resources in defeat, we believe such a man will never acquire these talents. That is why we have brilliant uses for those great and sublime men to whom heaven has granted not only courage but also heroic genius, and subordinate jobs for those who are subordinate. Among this latter group are those men who have grown old in some obscure war. They manage at best

to do only what they have done all their lives, and you mustn't begin to load them down with responsibilities when they are declining."

A moment afterward, curiosity again got the better of me, and I said to him: "I promise to ask you no more questions if you will permit just this one more. Who is that tall young man with much hair, very little wit, and so much impertinence? How does it happen that he talks louder than the others and is so pleased with himself for existing?"

"He is a lady-killer," [103] he replied. On these words, people came in, others left, some got up, someone came up to speak to my gentleman, and I remained as unenlightened as before. But a moment later, by what chance I do not know, I found this same young man next to me; turning to me, he said: "It is fine weather. Would you like, sir, to take a turn about the garden?" I answered him as politely as I knew how, and we went out together. "I came to the country," he told me, "to please the lady of the house, with whom I get along well. There will surely be a certain lady in social circles who* will not be pleased. But what to do about it? I see the most beautiful ladies of Paris, but I never settle on one and I pull the wool over all their eyes for, between the two of us, I'm not worth very much."

"Apparently you have some responsibility or position that prevents you from being more constant toward the ladies."

"No, sir, I have no other position than to drive a husband mad and bring a father to despair. I like to terrify a woman who thinks she has caught me and allow her to advance to within a hair* of my downfall. There are several of us young men who thus have all Paris divided among us and have it talking about our every movement."

"From what I understand," I said to him, "you make more noise than the most valiant warrior and are more esteemed than a sober magistrate. Were you in Persia you would not enjoy all these advantages; you would be more qualified to guard our women for us than to please them." My face grew flushed, and I believe that had I gone on talking I should not have been able to keep myself from being rude to him.

What have you to say about a country that tolerates

such people? Where they let a man who leads such an existence live? Where unfaithfulness, betrayal, rape, perfidy, and injustice lead to reputation? Where a man is held in esteem because he steals a daughter from her father or a wife from her husband and throws confusion into the sweetest and most holy of social relations? Happy the children of Ali who protect their families from the opprobrium of seduction! The light of day is not purer than the fire burning in the hearts of our women; our daughters think only with trembling of the day that is to despoil them of the virtue that makes them akin to angels and spiritual powers. Dear native land, upon which the sun casts his first glances, you are not soiled by those horrible crimes that oblige that heavenly body to hide his face as soon as he appears in the black West!

From Paris, the 5th of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1713.

LETTER XLIX

Rica to Usbek in ——

While sitting the other day in my room, I saw a dervish come in, dressed in most extraordinary fashion. His beard came all the way down to his rope-girdle; his feet were bare; his cloak gray, rough, and peaked in places. The whole apparition seemed so strange to me that my first idea was to have a painter fetched so as to make a "fantasy." [104]

At first, he paid me a grand compliment, in which he let me know that he was a worthy man, and moreover, a Capuchin. "I have been told, sir," he added, "that you will be returning soon to the court of Persia, where you hold an exalted rank. I have come to seek your protection and to ask you to obtain for us from the King a small dwelling, in the vicinity of Casbin,[105] for two or three monks."

"So, my father," I said to him, "you want to go to Persia?"

"I, sir?" he replied. "Far from it. I am Capuchin provincial [106] here, and I should not exchange my position for all the Capuchins in the world."

"Why then, what the devil do you want from me?"

"It's just that," he replied, "if we had that sanctuary in Persia, our fathers in Italy would send two or three of their own brothers there."

"Ah, then apparently you know these monks," I said.

"No, sir, I do not know them."

"Then by heaven, what does it matter to you whether they get to Persia or not? What a fine project to have a couple of Capuchins breathe the air of Casbin! That would be most useful to Europe and to Asia! And how vital to interest monarchs in such a project! That's what you might call fine colonies! Come now, you and your colleagues are not made to be transplanted, and you would do well to continue to crawl about in the places where you were engendered."

From Paris, the 15th of the Moon of Ramadan, 1713.

LETTER L

Rica to ——

I have known people in whom virtue was so natural that it never even made an impression on others. They were attached to their duty without bending under it and were led to it as if by instinct. Far from calling their rare qualities into relief by their speech, it seemed that such qualities had not yet been noticed by them. These are the people I like—not those virtuous men who seem astonished to be virtuous and who look upon a good deed as upon something miraculous that ought to surprise the listener when recounted.

If modesty is a virtue necessary to those whom heaven has blessed with great talents, what is to be said of those insects who dare to make show of a pride that would dishonor even the greatest men?

On all sides I meet people who talk ceaselessly about themselves. Their conversation is a mirror that always reflects their impertinent countenance. They will talk to you of the most insignificant things that have happened to them, and they hope that the interest they take in such trifles will magnify them in your eyes. They have done everything, seen everything, said everything, thought

everything. They are a universal model, an inexhaustible subject of comparison, a spring of examples which never dries up. Oh, how tiresome is praise when it turns always toward the place whence it has parted!

Some days ago a gentleman of this sort oppressed us during two full hours, about himself, his worth, and his talents. But since there is no perpetual motion in this world, he stopped talking. The conversation came back to us then and we took it.

A man who seemed rather morose started out by complaining of the boredom created by conversations. "What! Must we always have dull people who paint their own portraits and bring everything back to themselves?"

"You are right," our talker took over again abruptly. "They have only to do as I do. I never praise myself. I have wealth and position, and I am generous. My friends say that I have some wit. But I never speak of all that. If I possess any good qualities, the one I pride myself most on is my modesty."

I admired the impertinence of that fellow, and while he was talking so loud, I said very low: "Happy the man who has vanity enough never to speak well of himself, who fears his listeners and does not compromise his true worth with the pride of others!"

From Paris, the 20th of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1713.

LETTER LI

Nargum, envoy of Persia to Muscovy, to Usbek in Paris

I heard by letter from Persia that you had left Persia and were at the present time in Paris. Why must I hear news of you from any other than yourself?

The orders of the King of Kings have kept me for five years in this country, where I have accomplished several important negotiations.

You know that the Czar is the only Christian prince whose interests are involved with those of Persia, because, like ourselves, he is an enemy of the Turk.[107]

His empire is vaster than ours, for one can measure a thousand * leagues from Moscow to the last fortified city of his states toward China.

He is the absolute master of the life and possessions of his subjects, who are all slaves, with the exception of four families. The lieutenant of the prophets, the King of Kings who holds heaven for his footstool, makes no more formidable exercise of his power.

To consider the frightful climate of Moscow, one would never believe that it could be a punishment to be exiled from it. And yet, when a man is in disgrace, he is promptly banished to Siberia.

Just as the law of our Prophet forbids us to drink wine, so does the law of the prince forbid it to the Muscovites.

They have a way of receiving guests which is not at all the Persian way. As soon as a guest enters a house,* the husband introduces his wife to him, the guest kisses her, and this is construed as a mark of favor to the husband.

Although fathers, as a rule, stipulate in the marriage contracts of their daughters that the husband shall not whip them, nonetheless it is unbelievable how many Muscovite women like to be beaten.[108] They cannot understand how they can possess the heart of their husband if he doesn't beat them properly. Any other conduct on his part is an unforgivable mark of indifference.[109]

Here is a letter one of them wrote recently to her mother:

My dear Mother,

I am the most unhappy woman in the world. There is nothing I have left undone to make my husband love me and I have never been able to succeed. Yesterday I had a thousand things to do in the house; I went out and stayed out the whole day. I thought that when I came back he would beat me hard. But he spoke not a single word to me. My sister gets quite different treatment; her husband beats her every day. She cannot even look at another man without being immediately beaten. And so they love each other tenderly and live together in the best mutual understanding in the world.

That's what makes her so proud. But I shall not give her cause for deriding me much longer. I have resolved to have my husband love me at any price. I shall make him so furious that he will just have to show me the mark of his friendship. It will not be said that I am never beaten and that I live in his house without being noticed. At the very tiniest fillip he gives me, I shall cry at the top of my voice so that everybody will think he

is really going to it, and I think that if some neighbor were then to come to my assistance, I should strangle him. I beg of you, my dear mother, do be good enough to point out to my husband that he is treating me in an unworthy manner. My father, who is such an honorable man, did not act that way, and I remember that when I was a little girl, it used to seem to me sometimes that he loved you too much.

I embrace you, my dear Mother.

Muscovites are not allowed to leave the empire at all, even to travel.[110] Thus, separated from other nations by their own laws, they have preserved their ancient customs and with all the more attachment for not believing it possible that there could be others.

However, the prince who is now ruling has desired to change all that. He has had great quarrels with his subjects about their beards.[111] The clergy and monks have fought no less in favor of their ignorance.[112]

He is interested in encouraging the arts and overlooks nothing to bring to Europe and Asia the glory of his nation, up until now forgotten and known almost solely unto itself.

Restless and always in motion, he wanders throughout his vast states, leaving everywhere the marks of his natural austerity.

Then he departs, as if his states were unable to contain him, and goes off to Europe looking for other provinces and new kingdoms.

I embrace you, my dear Usbek. Let me hear from you, I implore you.

From Moscow, the 2nd of the Moon of Shalval, 1713.

LETTER LII

Rica to Usbek in ——

The other day I was invited to a social gathering where I had a rather good time. There were women of all ages: one of eighty, one of sixty, and one of forty, who had a niece of twenty or twenty-two. Some instinct made me walk up to the niece, and she whispered in my ear: "What do you think of my aunt, who at her age would like to have lovers and tries to make herself pretty?"

"She is wrong," I said. "That is a project which befits only you." A moment later, I was near her aunt, who said to me: "What do you think of that woman, who is at least sixty and who spent more than an hour today on her toilette?"

"It's time wasted," I said, "and one would have to have your charms to even think of it." I went over to that unhappy woman of sixty and was pitying her within myself when she whispered in my ear: "Can there be anything so ridiculous? Do you see that woman of eighty who is wearing flame-red ribbons? She is trying to play at being young and she is succeeding, for such conduct comes close to second childhood."

"Ah, good Lord!" I exclaimed to myself. "Shall we always feel the ridiculous side only in the other fellow?" Then later I added: "Perhaps it is a good thing that we should find consolation in the foibles of others." Still, I was being amused by all this, and I said to myself: "We have gone up enough. Let's start down now and begin with the old lady at the top."

"Madame," I said, "you bear such a striking resemblance to that lady with whom I have just spoken that you would appear to be her sister, and I should think, of the same age."

"In truth, sir," she said, "when one of us dies, the other ought to be very fearful indeed, for I do not think there is two days' difference between us." When I had thus trapped this decrepit lady, I went to the lady of sixty and said, showing her the lady of forty: "Madame, you must decide a wager I have made. I wagered that that lady and yourself are the same age."

"My word," she replied, "I don't think there is six months' difference between us."

"Good," I said, "I caught that one; let's continue." I continued on down and went to the lady of forty. "Madame," I said, "do me the favor of telling me if it is for a joke that you call that lady at the other table your niece? You are as young as she is. She even carries a suggestion of the past in her face; you certainly do not have that. And those lively colors that show up in your complexion . . ."

"Let's see now," she replied, "I am her aunt, but her mother was at least twenty-five years my elder; we were

not children of the same marriage. I have heard my late sister say that her daughter and I were born in the same year."

"I was right then in saying so, madame, and I was not wrong to be surprised."

My dear Usbek, women who anticipate their approaching decline through the loss of their beauty would like to move back toward their youth. Well, why shouldn't they keep trying to fool others? They do their best to fool themselves and thus escape the most painful of thoughts.[113]

From Paris, the 3rd of the
Moon of Shalval, 1713.

LETTER LIII

Zelis to Usbek in Paris

Never has a passion been stronger and more violent than that of Cosrou, the white eunuch, for my slave Zelide. He asks her hand in marriage with such fury that I cannot refuse him. And why should I resist when her mother does not, and when Zelide herself seems satisfied at the idea of this false marriage and the vain hope held out to her by it.

What does she propose to do with that unhappy fellow, who of all the qualities of a husband will possess only jealousy? A man who will take leave of his frigidity only to enter upon useless despair, who will always remember what he was and thus make himself remember what he is no longer. A man who, ever willing, and never able, to give himself, will endlessly deceive himself and her and make her suffer every moment the misfortune of his condition?

What then! Live always only in images and in phantoms! Live only to imagine! Ever to be near pleasure and never in it! Languishing in the arms of an unfortunate soul, and rather than responding to his sighs, responding only to his regrets!

What scorn must one have for a man of the sort, made only to guard and never to possess! I search for love and cannot see it there.

I speak to you freely because you like my naïveté, and

you prefer my free approach and sensitivity to pleasure to the feigned modesty of my companions.

I have heard you say a thousand times that eunuchs find with women a voluptuousness unknown to us, that nature compensates for her losses, that she has resources to make up for the disadvantage of their condition, that one can stop being a man but never cease being sensitive, and that, in that state, a person is as if in a third sensuality where, so to speak, he only changes pleasures.

If that were true I should find Zelide less to be pitied: it is something to live with people less unhappy than oneself.

Give me your orders on this, and let me know if you wish the marriage to take place in the seraglio.

Farewell.

From the seraglio of Ispahan,
the 5th of the Moon of Shalval, 1713.

LETTER LIV

Rica to Usbek in ——

This morning I was in my room, which, as you know, is separated from the others only by a very thin partition with openings in several places so that all that gets said in the next room can be heard. A man who was striding back and forth was saying to another: "I don't know how to explain it, but everything is turning against me. For over three days I have said nothing to my honor, and I have embarked pell-mell into every conversation without anyone's paying the slightest attention to me or addressing me twice. I had prepared several witticisms with which to spice my conversation; no one would ever let me work them in. I had a very pretty tale to tell but every time just as I wanted to get to it, people would escape it* as if on purpose. I have several puns that have been aging in my head for four days without my getting the slightest use from them. If this continues I believe I shall finish up a booby. Such would seem to be my unlucky star, and I can't seem to free myself. Yesterday I had hoped to sparkle with three or four old ladies, who certainly never get the better of me, and I was planning to say the prettiest things in the world. I spent more than a quarter

of an hour directing my conversation, but they never kept to the same subject, and they cut off, like some fatal Parcae, the thread of all my talk. Do you want me to tell you something? The reputation of being a wit costs a lot to uphold. I don't know how you managed it."

"An idea just came to me," continued the other. "Let's work together to build up our wit; let's co-operate. Every day we will tell each other what we should talk about, and we shall help each other so well that if someone comes to interrupt us in the middle of our ideas, we shall drag him along ourselves, and if he does not come along willingly, we shall use violence. We shall agree on the places where we must approve, those where we must smile, others where we must laugh outright and resoundingly. You will see that we shall set the tone for all conversations and that people will admire the vivacity of our minds and the pertinence of our repartee. We shall protect each other with mutual nods. Today you will sparkle; tomorrow you will be my second. I shall enter into a house with you and cry as I point you out: 'I must tell you a very clever reply monsieur just made to a man we found in the street.' And I shall turn toward you and say: 'He didn't expect to at all, he was quite astonished.' Then I shall recite some of my verses and you will say: 'I was there when he composed them; it was during a supper party and he didn't take time off to reflect one minute.' Often we shall mock each other and people will say: 'See how well they attack! How well they defend themselves! They don't spare each other. Let's just see how he'll get out of that one. Marvelous! What presence of mind! Why, it's a regular battle!' But by evening they will not find it possible to believe that we had skirmished earlier. We shall have to buy certain books—witticisms collected for those without wit who would like to counterfeit it. Everything depends on having good models. After six months, I should like us to be able to hold a full hour's conversation completely filled with witticisms. But we must be careful about one thing, and that is to be sure our witticisms make their way. It's not enough to say them; they must be spread and strewn everywhere. If not, it's so much lost, and I must confess that there is nothing so discouraging as to see a charming thing one has said die in the ear of some fool who hears it. True, there is often a

compensation, for we are also capable of saying stupidities which get by *incognito*, and that's our sole consolation in such situations. There, my dear fellow, is the method we must follow. Do as I say and I promise you a chair in the Academy before six months have gone by. Which means that our working days will not be long. For, by that time, you can forget your technique; you will be a witty man no matter what you do. It can be noted that in France, as soon as a man makes his appearance in a particular company, he takes on from the start what is called the *esprit de corps*. You will do the same, and I fear for you only an excess of applause."

From Paris, the 6th of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1714.

LETTER LV

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

In European nations, the first quarter hour of marriage takes care of all the difficulties. The bestowal of final favors can be dated from the nuptial benediction. Women here do not act as do our Persian ladies, who sometimes contend over every inch of the ground for months on end. Nothing is so self-evident:* if these women lose nothing it's because they have nothing to lose. But, oh shameful fact, the moment of their defeat is always known, and without consulting the stars, the precise hour of their children's birth can be foretold.

Frenchmen practically never speak about their wives. That's because they're afraid to speak of them in the presence of people who know them better than they do.

There are among them some most wretched men whom none can console; these are the jealous husbands. There are also some whom everyone scorns; these are also jealous husbands.

But then there is no country where their number is so small as among Frenchmen. Their peace of mind is not based on the confidence they have in their wives; on the contrary, it stems from the bad opinion they have of them. All of the wise precautions of Asiatics—the veils that cover women, the prisons where they are enclosed, the vigilance of their eunuchs—seem to Frenchmen more apt

to encourage rather than tire the ingenuity of that sex. Here husbands accept their lot with good grace and consider the unfaithfulness of their wives as a stroke of some inevitable fate. A husband who insisted upon keeping his wife to himself would be looked upon as a disturber of the public pleasure, as a madman who would profit by the light of the sun to the exclusion of other men.

Here a husband who loves his wife is a man lacking the attraction to make himself loved by another woman: he is a man who takes improper advantage of the rigor of the law to make up for the charm he lacks, who makes full use of all his prerogatives to the detriment of a whole society, who appropriates what was granted to him only on assignment, and who does his level best to upset a tacit convention that brings happiness to both sexes. The right of being the husband of a pretty wife, which is concealed so carefully in Asia, is worn here with ease. Everyone feels readily disposed to seek a diversion wherever he can. A prince consoles himself for the loss of one fortress by taking another. When the Turks were taking Baghdad from us, weren't we busy taking the fortress of Kandahar from the Mogul? [114]

A man who, in general, permits the unfaithfulness of his wife is not censored. On the contrary, he is praised for his prudence. It is only particular cases that might dishonor him.

Not that there are no virtuous ladies. It can even be said that they claim a certain distinction. My guide always pointed them out to me. But they were all so ugly that a man would have to be a saint not to hate virtue.

After what I have told you about the customs of this country, you can easily imagine that Frenchmen do not worry much about fidelity. They find it just as ridiculous to swear to a woman that they will always love her as to maintain that they will always be in good health, or always happy. When they promise a woman that they will always love her, they understand that she, for her part, promises them to remain lovable and if she is not as good as her word, they no longer feel bound to theirs.

From Paris, the 7th of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1714.

LETTER LVI

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna

Gambling is much in vogue in Europe:[115] being a gambler is a profession. That title alone takes the place of birth, property, and probity. It raises every man who carries it to honorable rank, without investigation, although there is none so unaware as not to realize he has very often been mistaken in such a judgment. But then, everyone has agreed to be incorrigible.

Women, especially, are much taken by it. It is true that they are rarely drawn to it in their youth except to encourage a fonder passion. But as they grow older, their passion for gaming seems to grow younger, and this single passion fills up the void of all the others.

They are intent on ruining their husbands, and to succeed in their plan, they have methods for all ages, from the tenderest youth to the most decrepit old age. Clothing and carriages start the trouble; flirtation compounds it; gaming finishes it off.

I have often see nine or ten women, or rather nine or ten ages, gathered about a table. I have watched them in their hopes, in their fears, in their triumphs, above all in their rages. You might have said that they would never have time to calm down and that the breath of life would leave them in advance of their despair. You would have been in doubt as to whether those they were paying were their creditors or their heirs.

It would appear that our Holy Prophet had principally in mind to keep us from everything capable of perplexing our reason. He forbade to us the use of wine since it buries reason; by an explicit rule, he forbade games of chance to us;[116] and when it was impossible for him to remove the cause of our passions, he attenuated them. Love, among our kind, involves no vexation, no rage. It is a languid passion, which leaves our soul in tranquillity. The plurality of women saves us from their despotism. Their numbers temper the violence of our desires.

From Paris, the 18th* of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1714.

LETTER LVII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

The libertines here keep an infinite number of prostitutes, and the devout, a countless number of dervishes. These dervishes take three vows: obedience, poverty, and chastity. It is said that the first is the one best observed by all. As to the second, I can tell you it is not observed at all. I leave you to judge of the third.

Yet, however rich these dervishes may be, they never cease styling themselves poor—our magnificent sultan would sooner give up his magnificent and sublime titles. They are right. For the title of poor man keeps them from being so.

Doctors and some of these dervishes called *confessors* are always either too well-regarded or too ill-regarded here. Still it is said that prospective heirs get along better with doctors than with confessors.

The other day I was in a monastery of these dervishes. One of them, venerable by reason of his white hair, received me most politely. He had me shown over the whole establishment. We went on into the garden and started to converse. "Father," I asked, "what function do you have within the community?"

"Sir," he replied, seeming very pleased by my question, "I am a casuist."

"A casuist?" I repeated. "Since I have been in France I have never heard of that office."

"What! you don't know what a casuist is? Well then, listen. I am going to give you a notion of it which will leave nothing to be desired. There are two kinds of sins: mortal sins, which exclude absolutely from paradise, and venial ones, which offend God, it is true, but do not irritate him to the point of excluding us from the blessed state. Now our whole science consists in distinguishing carefully between these two kinds of sins. For, with the exception of a few libertines, all Christians want to get to paradise. But there is scarcely any man who wants to get there at higher cost than is absolutely necessary. When a man is well-informed about mortal sins, he tries not to commit that kind, and he is taken care of. There are some

men who do not aspire to such complete perfection, and since they are without ambition, do not trouble themselves about having the first place. And so they get into paradise on as close a margin as they can shave. As long as they get there, that's enough for them. Their aim is to do neither more nor less. These are the people who take heaven by storm rather than by earning it, and they say to God: 'Lord, I have just exactly fulfilled the conditions, and you cannot refuse to hold to your promise. Since I have done no more than you required, I relieve you of granting me more than you have promised.'

"And so we become necessary people, sir. Still, that is not the whole picture; you will soon see something else. The act does not make the crime; it is the knowledge of him who commits it. The man who commits a sin while he can still believe that it is not one, is secure in his conscience, and since there are an endless number of dubious acts, a casuist can by declaring them good, assign to them a degree of goodness they do not possess. Provided he can make convincing proof that they carry no malice, he removes the stigma from them entirely. I am telling you now the secret of a trade in which I have grown old. I am letting you see the fine points of it. There's a good light to throw on everything, even on things that seem least to lend themselves to it."

"Father," I said, "all that is very well, but how do you square yourself with heaven? If the Sophy had in his court a man° who did to him what you do to God, who brought gradations into his commands and taught his subjects when they should carry them out, he would have him impaled on the spot." I bowed to my dervish and left him without awaiting his reply.

From Paris, the 23rd of the
Moon of Maharram, 1714.

LETTER LVIII

Rica to Rhedi in Venice

In Paris, my dear Rhedi, there are many professions.

For a little money, an obliging fellow here will come to offer you the secret of making gold.

Another promises to arrange to have you sleep with the ethereal spirits, provided you spend only thirty years without seeing women.

You will find such clever seers that they will tell you your whole life, provided they have had only one quarter hour of conversation with your servants.

Other clever women make of virginity a flower that flourishes and is born again every day, a flower that is plucked the hundredth time more painfully than the first.

There are others who, repairing the damage of time by the cleverness of their art, know how to reestablish tottering beauty on a face and even to recall a woman from the peak of age and have her descend to the tenderest moment of youth.

All these people live or try to live in a city that is the mother of invention.

The incomes of her citizens cannot be consistently taxed. They consist only in wit and ingenuity. Each man has his own, and he exploits it as best he can.

The man trying to enumerate all the interpreters of Holy Writ* who pursue the revenue of a mosque would certainly soon have counted the grains of sand of the sea and the slaves of our monarch.

An infinite number of masters of languages and arts and sciences teach what they do not know. This talent is not inconsiderable, for you do not need much of a head to teach you what you do know, but you need a considerable one to teach what you don't.

One can die here only suddenly. Death could not possibly exercise its sway otherwise, for in every nook and cranny there are people with certain remedies for all imaginable diseases.

All the shops are strung with invisible nets in which the buyers are caught. Sometimes, however, one gets off cheap; a young salesgirl will cajole a man for a whole hour to make him buy a package of toothpicks.

There is not a man who does not leave this city a warier person than when he came. By dint of sharing his wealth with others, he learns to preserve it. That is the sole advantage of being a foreigner in this city of enchantments.

From Paris, the 10th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1714.

LETTER LIX

Rica to Usbek in ——

The other day I was in a house where there was a company of people of all sorts. I found the conversation in the hands of two old women who had worked all morning, in vain, to rejuvenate themselves. "You must admit," one of them was saying, "that men today are quite different from those we used to see in our youth. They used to be polite, gracious, and agreeable. But nowadays I find them insufferably crude."

"Everything is changed," a man who appeared to be weighed down with gout said at this point. "Times aren't what they were forty years ago: everyone was in good health, people walked about, they were gay, they wanted only to laugh and dance. Nowadays, everyone is intolerably sad."

A moment later the conversation turned to politics. "Great heaven!" said an old noble, "the state is not governed any more. Find for me now a minister like M. Colbert. I knew him very well, that M. Colbert. He was one of my friends. He always had my pensions paid to me in advance of everybody, no matter whom. Oh, the fine order there was then in finances! Everyone lived easily. But today I am ruined."

At this point a cleric said: "Sir, you are speaking of the most miraculous period of our invincible monarch. Could anything be greater than what he then did to destroy heresy?"

"And do you attach no importance to the suppression of duels?" another man, who had not yet spoken, asked with satisfaction.

"There's a judicious remark," someone said in my ear, "that fellow is charmed by the edict, and he observes it so well that six months ago he received a hundred blows with a stick in order not to violate it."

It seems to me, Usbek, that we never judge of matters except by a secret reflex we make upon ourselves. I am not surprised that Negroes should paint the devil in blinding white, and their own gods black as coal; nor that the Venus of certain tribes should have paps hanging to her knees; nor that all idolaters should have pictured their

gods with human faces, and should have advised them of all their own inclinations. It has been well said that if triangles were to create a god, they would give him three sides.[117]

My dear Usbek, when I see men crawling about on an atom,[118] I mean the earth, which is only a speck of the universe, and proposing themselves as models of divine providence, I don't know how to reconcile so much extravagance with so much pettiness.

From Paris, the 14th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1714.

LETTER LX

Usbek to Ibben at Smyrna

You ask if there are any Jews in France. Know that wherever there is money, there are Jews. You ask me what they do. Exactly what they do in Persia: nothing can be so alike as an Asian Jew and a European Jew.

They make show among Christians, just as among us, of an invincible obstinacy in favor of their religion—an obstinacy that assumes the proportions of folly.

The Jewish religion is an old trunk that has produced two branches that have covered the earth; I mean Mohammedanism and Christianity. Or rather, it is a mother who has borne two daughters who have inflicted a thousand wounds upon her, for in matters of religion, those nearest to each other are the greatest enemies. But however bad the treatment she has received from them, she never ceases to glorify herself for having brought them into the world. She uses the two of them to embrace the whole world, while, on another plane, her venerable age embraces all time.

The Jews consider themselves, therefore, as the wellspring of all holiness and the origin of all religion. They look upon us, in contrast, as heretics who have changed the law, or rather as rebel Jews.

If the change had taken place gradually, they believe they would have been easily seduced. But as it took place suddenly and violently, and since they can mark the day and the hour of both births, they take offense at finding in

us measured ages, and they hold firm to a religion that even the creation of the world did not antedate.

They have never known in Europe a calm similar to that they now enjoy. Christians are beginning to cast off that spirit of intolerance by which they were once animated. They found themselves in bad straits for having expelled the Jews from Spain, and in France they suffered for having harassed Christians whose belief differed a bit from that of the Prince. They have realized that the zeal for advancement of religion is different from the attachment one should have for it and that to love and observe one's religion, it is not necessary to hate and persecute those who do not observe it.[119]

It would be desirable for our Mussulmans to think with as much common sense on that score as the Christians, and it would be desirable also for them to manage to make peace between Ali and abu-Bakr[120] and to leave to God the problem of deciding on the relative merits of those holy prophets. I should like them to be honored by acts of veneration and respect, and not by vain show of preference, and I should like to see us deserve their favor whatever place God has assigned them, be it to the right or under the footstool of his throne.

From Paris, the 18th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1714.

LETTER LXI

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

The other day I went into a famous church called Notre-Dame. While I was admiring the superb edifice, I had occasion to chat with a cleric drawn there, as I was, out of curiosity. The conversation turned to the tranquillity of his calling.

"Most people," he said to me, "envy us the happiness of our profession, and they are right. Nonetheless, it has its disadvantages. We are not so completely cut off from the world as not to be recalled to it on a thousand occasions. And there, we have a very difficult role to maintain.

"Worldly people are amazing; they can tolerate neither our approval nor our censure. If we try to correct them,

they find us ridiculous. If we approve of them, they consider that we are acting below our character. Nothing can be so humiliating as to think that we have offended even the impious themselves. Thus we are forced to hold to an equivocal conduct and to impose our influence on libertines not by our firm character but by the uncertainty in which we keep them as to how we shall judge their words. A man needs a great deal of wit for that; such a state of neutrality is difficult. People of the social world, who are willing to risk all, who lend themselves to all the libertines' witticisms, and who according to each case, encourage or abandon, succeed much better.

"And that's not all. This happy, tranquil life that is so much praised is something we cannot preserve in society. As soon as we go out into the world, we are dragged into arguments. Pressure is put on us to undertake, for example, to prove the efficacy of prayer, to a man who does not believe in God, or to prove the necessity of fasting to another who all his life has denied the immortality of the human soul. The going is painful, and the mockers are not on our side. There is even more than that. A certain desire to draw others to our own opinions torments us continually and is, so to speak, an essential part of our profession. This is as ridiculous as if you were to see Europeans at work, for the good of humanity, trying to whiten the faces of Africans. We create unrest in the state; we torture ourselves to have nonessential points of religion accepted, and thereby we resemble that conqueror of China who forced his subjects to a general revolt for having tried to make them cut their hair or their nails.[121]

"Our very zeal in having the duties of our holy religion fulfilled by those for whom we feel responsible is often dangerous, and we cannot exercise too much prudence in carrying out our mission. An emperor named Theodosius had all the inhabitants of a city put to the sword, even the women and children. Later, when he appeared before a church and wished to enter, a bishop named Ambrose[122] had the doors shut on him as a murderer and flaunter of religion. By so doing he performed a heroic action. The Emperor, finally having been admitted to the church, walked over to join the priests. The same bishop made him leave, and this time, he acted like a fanatic.* Thus it remains true indeed that we must distrust our

zeal. What matter for religion or the state if that prince did or did not join the priests in the church?" [123]

From Paris, the 1st of the
Moon of Rebiab I, 1714.

LETTER LXII

Zelis to Usbek in Paris

Since your daughter has reached her seventh year, I thought it time to have her enter into the inner apartments of the seraglio[124] and not to wait until she is ten to give her into the keeping of the black eunuchs. You can't start too early to cut a young person off from the freedom of childhood and give her a holy education within the sacred walls where modesty dwells.

For I cannot agree with those mothers who shut a daughter away only when they are about to give her a husband, who condemn their daughters to a seraglio rather than consecrate them to it and who, with violence, make them accept a way of life the mothers should have been inspiring in them. Are we to expect everything from the strength of reason and nothing whatsoever from the gentle effect of habit?

In vain do they talk to us of the subordinate position in which Nature has placed us. It is not enough to make us feel that. We must practice our role of subordinate so that it may hold us firm through the critical period when passions begin to appear and encourage us toward independence.

If we were tied to you only by bonds of duty, we could sometimes manage to forget them. If we were drawn toward you only by inclination, a stronger inclination might very well weaken the first. But when the laws give us over to one man, they take us away from all others and place us as far away from them as if we were a hundred thousand leagues away.

Nature, industriously bent on the welfare of men, has not limited herself to giving desires to them. She wanted us to have our own and chose that we should be the living instruments of men's felicity. She put us into the fire of passions in order to enable men to live peacefully. If men

stray from their unfeeling equilibrium, Nature has destined us to bring them back to it, without our ever being able to enjoy that happy state where we place them. And yet, Usbek, you must not imagine that your lot is happier than mine. I have enjoyed here a thousand pleasures unknown to you. My imagination has worked untiringly to make me appreciate them properly. I have lived, and you have only languished.

Even in this very prison where you hold me, I am freer than you. You could not possibly redouble your concern for guarding me without my drawing pleasure from your worry. Your suspicions, your jealousy, and your heartaches are all so many proofs of your dependency.

Go on with them, Usbek. Have me watched over day and night. Don't even rely on ordinary precautions. Add to my happiness by assuring your own, and know that I dread nothing save your indifference.[125]

From the seraglio of Ispahan,
the 2nd of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1714.

LETTER LXIII

Rica to Usbek in ——

I believe you would like to pass your whole life in the country. At first, I lost you from view for only two or three days, and now I haven't seen you for two weeks. It is true that you are in a charming house, that you are discovering there a company that suits you, and that thus you can discourse to your heart's content. No more is needed to make you forget the whole universe.

As for me, I am leading about the same sort of life you saw me leading before. I get around the world of society and try to get to know it well. My mind is slowly losing everything Asiatic that was left in it, and I am adapting painlessly to European customs. I am no longer so startled to see five or six women with five or six men in a house, and I find this is not such a bad idea.

I can really say that I have known women only since I've been here. I have learned more about them in a month than I would have learned after thirty years in a seraglio.

With us their characters are all the same because they are forced into a mold. We don't see people as they really are but as they are forced to be. In that servitude of heart and mind there is talk only of fear, which has but one language, and no talk of nature, which expresses itself in such varied ways and appears under so many forms.

Dissimulation, that art so practiced and so necessary among us, is unknown here. Everything speaks out; everything is visible; everything is audible. The heart shows itself as clearly as the face. In their customs, in their virtue, even in vice, something akin to naïveté is always visible.

To be pleasing to women, one needs a certain talent different from the particular one that pleases them even more. This consists in a kind of light, bantering wit that amuses them in that it seems to promise them at every moment what can be possessed only at long intervals.

This bantering, a natural creation for boudoirs, seems to have come to form the general character of the whole nation. They banter in government deliberations; they banter at the head of an army; they banter with an ambassador. Professions take on a ridiculous aspect only in direct proportion to the seriousness with which they are taken: a doctor would not be ridiculous if his clothing were less lugubrious and if he killed off his patients while bantering.

From Paris, the 10th of the
Moon of Rebiab I, 1714.

LETTER LXIV

The chief black eunuch to Usbek in Paris

I am in a difficult strait that, magnificent lord, I cannot possibly convey to you. The harem is in frightful confusion and disorder. War rules among your wives. Your eunuchs are divided. Nothing is to be heard save complaining, muttering, and reproach. My gestures of protest are scorned. Everything seems permissible in this period of license, and I carry now only an empty title in this harem.

Not one of your wives fails to consider herself above the others by her birth, her beauty, her wealth, her wit,

or your love. And there is not one who does not try to use some of these claims in order to have all the marks of honor for herself. I am every moment losing that long patience which, nonetheless and to my sorrow, has made them all dissatisfied. My prudence, my affability (such a rare virtue in the position I occupy), have been useless.

Shall I disclose to you, magnificent lord, the cause of all these disorders? It comes completely from your heart and from the tender regard you have for the women. If you did not restrain my hand, if instead of the path of reasoning, you allowed me that of punishment, if not allowing yourself to soften at their whining and weeping, you sent them to do their crying in front of me—since I would never soften—then, taking no heed of their imperious and independent humor, I should soon fashion them to the yoke they ought to wear.

Kidnapped at fifteen from the depths of my country, Africa,[126] I was first sold to a master who had more than twenty wives or concubines. Having decided from my serious and taciturn temperament that I was meant for the seraglio, he gave orders that the finishing touches be put to me for such a purpose and had performed on me an operation which, painful at first, proved fortunate to me later, since it brought me close to the ear and trust of my masters. I went into that harem, and it was a new world to me. The head eunuch, the strictest man I have ever seen in my life, ruled there with an iron hand. There was no breath of cabal or quarrel; a deep silence reigned everywhere. All the women were in bed at the same hour from one year's end to the next, and all arose at the same hour. They went to their baths one after the other and came out on the least sign we made to them. The rest of the time, they were almost always shut up in their rooms. One rule he had was to make them observe complete neatness, and to that end he made use of indescribable surveillance. The least refusal to obey was punished unmercifully. "I am a slave," he would say, "but I am slave to a man who is your master and mine, and I make use of the power he has granted me over you. It is he who punishes you and not I, for I am only the arm of the master." These women never entered my master's bedchamber unless they were called there. They accepted the favor with pleasure and noticed their being deprived of it with-

out complaint. And even I, who was the least of the blacks in that peaceful seraglio, was a thousand times more respected than I am in yours, where I govern all.

As soon as that great eunuch became aware of my talents, he turned his eyes in my direction. He spoke of me to my master, as being a man capable of working according to his desires, and worthy of succeeding to the post he himself filled. He was not at all astonished by my extreme youth; he believed that my application would make up for my inexperience. How shall I say it? I made such great advances into his trust that he no longer saw any obstacle in putting into my hands the keys of the terrible places that he had guarded for so long. It was under that great teacher that I learned the difficult art of commanding, under him that I learned to conform to the maxims of inflexible government. Under him I studied the hearts of women; he taught me to take advantage of their weakness and never to be surprised at their haughtiness. He often had the pleasure* of watching me lead them to the last stronghold of obedience. Afterward he made them bit by bit retreat from it and wanted me to have the appearance, for a little while, of yielding too. But when you really should have observed him was in those moments when he found the women bordering on despair, between prayers and reproaches. He buoyed up their tears without becoming emotionally involved * and felt soothed by that sort of triumph. "That," he would say, "is how to rule women. Their number does not bother me; I should handle equally well all the women of our great monarch. How can a man hope to captivate their hearts if his faithful eunuchs have not begun by subjugating their minds?"

He was not only firm but also profound. He read their thoughts and their dissemblings; their studied gestures, their deceitful faces never hid anything from him. He knew their most secret actions and their most intimate words. He used these secrets to learn others, and he rejoiced in rewarding the tiniest shred of confidence. Since they never came close to their husband except when called, the eunuch called forward whomever he wished and drew the attention of his master upon the one he had in mind. Such preference was recompense for some secret revealed to him. He had persuaded his master that it was

perfectly proper to leave the choice to him so as to enlarge his authority. That is how things were ordered, magnificent lord, in a seraglio that was, I believe, the best governed in all of Persia.

Leave my hands free; permit me to force obedience. One week will see order put back into the heart of confusion. That is what your glory calls for and your security demands.

From your seraglio of Ispahan,
the 9th of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1714.

LETTER LXV

Usbek to his wives in the seraglio of Ispahan

I have just found out that the seraglio is in disorder and filled with quarrels and dissension. What did I enjoin upon you as I departed if not peace and good understanding? You promised me as much. Was it only to deceive me?

It is yourselves who would be deceived were I willing to follow the advice given me by the grand eunuch, and if I chose to employ my authority to force you to live as my exhortations required of you.

I should not think of using such violent methods until I had tried all the others. Out of consideration for yourselves, therefore, do what you did not choose to do out of consideration for me.

The first eunuch has good reason to complain; he says you have no respect for him. How can you reconcile such conduct with the modesty proper to your position? Is it not to him that your virtue is confided during my absence? He is the trustee of that sacred treasure. But the scorn you show for him makes it clear that those charged with making you live within the laws of honor are a burden to you.

I beg of you, therefore, amend your ways and do so well therein that I may, once more, reject the propositions made to me threatening your freedom and tranquillity.

For I should like to make you forget that I am your master so that I may remember only that I am your husband.

From Paris, the 5th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1714.

LETTER LXVI

Rica to ——

People here make much of the sciences; but I am not so sure they are very learned. The man who doubts universally as a philosopher dares to deny nothing as a theologian. Such a contradictory man is always satisfied with himself, as long as all agree on his qualifications.

The madness of most Frenchmen is to have wit, and the madness of those who would have wit is to produce books.

And yet, nothing could be so poorly thought out. Nature would seem to have arranged for human stupidity to be transitory, whereas books tend only to immortalize it. A dolt should rest content with having bored all those who have lived in contact with him, but on top of that, he wants to torture future races of men; he wants his stupidity to triumph over an oblivion from which he might have benefited as from the tomb. He wants posterity to be aware that he has lived, and he desires that for all eternity, it should recognize him as a dolt.

Of all authors, I scorn none so much as the compiler, who operates in all directions looking for snatches of other men's works to squeeze into his own, like clods of sod in a lawn. Such men are in no way superior to print-shop workers who collate characters that taken together form a book for which the worker has provided only his hands. I should like people to respect original works, and it seems a kind of profanation to me to pull out the pieces composing them from the sanctuary where they stand and thus expose them to a ridicule they in no way deserve.

When a man has nothing new to say, why doesn't he keep quiet? What need have we for such double use of texts?

"But I want to establish a new order of ideas."

"Ah, you are a clever man! You come into my library and put down below the books that were above, and above, those that were below. What a fine masterwork!"

I am writing to you on this subject, ——, because I am furious at a book I have just put aside. It is so fat that

it seemed to contain the Universal Knowledge, but it split my head without teaching me anything.

Adieu.

From Paris, the 8th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1714.

LETTER LXVII

Ibben to Usbek in Paris

Three ships have arrived here without bringing me news of you. Are you ill? Or do you take pleasure in worrying me?

If you do not love me in a country where you have no ties, what will it be like in Persia, in the bosom of your family? But perhaps I am wrong to say this; wherever you go, you are likable enough to find friends. The heart is a citizen of all countries. How can a comely soul keep from forming ties? I admit to you that I respect old friendships, but I am not vexed by continually forming new ones wherever I go.

In whatever country I have been, I have ever lived as if I were to pass my whole life there.[127] I have had the same warm feelings for virtuous people, the same compassion—or rather fondness—for the unfortunate, the same esteem for those not blinded by prosperity. That's part of my character, Usbek. Wherever I find men, I shall make friends for myself.

There is a Gheber[128] here who, next to yourself, I think, holds first place in my heart: he is the very soul of honesty. Personal reasons made him retire to this city, where he lives peacefully from an honest business and with a wife he loves. His life is completely characterized by generous deeds, and although he seeks to live obscurely, there is more of the heroic in his heart than in that of the greatest monarchs.

I have spoken a thousand times to him of you. I show him all your letters, and I note that this gives him pleasure. I can see already that you have a friend still unknown to you.

You will find here the story of his principal adven-

tures. Whatever the reluctance he had in writing them, he could not withhold them from my friendship; I am herewith confiding them to yours.

THE STORY OF APHERIDON AND ASTARTE

I was born among the Ghebers, into a religion that is perhaps the oldest in the world. So unfortunate was I, that love came to me before reason. I was barely six years old and already I could not live without my sister. My eyes were ever fixed on her, and whenever she left me for a brief moment, she would find those eyes bathed in tears upon return. Each day added as much to my love as to my age. My father, surprised by such a strong attachment, would very much have liked to marry us to each other according to the ancient custom of the Ghebers, introduced by Cambyses,[129] but fear of the Mohammedans, under whose yoke we lived, restrains the people of our nation from thinking of such holy alliances, which our religion demands rather than sanctions and which constitute such frank images of a union already formed by nature.

Thus, my father, seeing that it would be dangerous to follow my inclination and his own, resolved that he would extinguish what he believed to be a nascent passion but which, in reality, had grown to its full height. He made pretext of taking a trip and took me with him, entrusting my sister to one of his woman relatives, for my mother had been dead two years. I shall not try to tell you the degree of despair that followed on that separation. I embraced a sister bathed in tears; as for me, I was tearless, for my grief had brought me as it were to unconsciousness. We arrived in Tiflis, and my father, having entrusted my upbringing to one of our relatives, left me there and returned home.

Some time later I learned that with the influence of one of his friends, he had arranged for my sister to enter the King's harem, where she was serving-maid to a sultana. If I had learned of her death, I could not have been more thunderstruck, for beside the fact that I could no longer hope to see her, her acceptance into the *beiram*[130] had made her Mohammedan, and she could not, according to the prejudices of that religion, look upon me except with horror. Nevertheless, I returned to Ispahan. My first words

to my father were bitter ones. I accused him of having put his daughter in a place where one could set foot only after changing religions. "You have called down on your family," I said, "the wrath of God and of the Sun, which enlightens you. You have committed a worse crime than if you had contaminated the Elements, for you have contaminated your daughter, who is no less pure than they. I shall die of grief and love, but may my death be the sole punishment God may cause you to suffer." With these words, I left and for two years I passed my life going to survey the walls of the *beiram*, trying to guess where my sister could be, a thousand times each day risking decapitation by the eunuchs who do sentry duty around those fearful enclosures.

Finally my father died, and the sultana whom my sister served, noting that each day she grew in beauty, became jealous of her and married her to a eunuch who passionately desired her. In this fashion, my sister left the seraglio and settled down in a house in Ispahan with her eunuch.

For three months there was no possibility of speaking to her. The eunuch, most jealous of all men, always put me off under various pretexts. Finally I got into his harem, and he arranged for me to speak to her through a jalousie.[131] Lynxes' eyes could never have seen her, so swathed was she in cloths and veils, and I could recognize her only by the sound of her voice. What then was my emotion at being so near and yet so far away! I controlled myself, for I was being observed. As for her, it seemed to me that she shed several tears. Her husband tried to make bad excuses to me, but I treated him as the lowliest of slaves. He was quite disconcerted when he realized that I was speaking a language unknown to him. It was ancient Persian, which is our sacred language.

"How now! my sister," I said, "is it true that you have abandoned the religion of your ancestors? I know that upon entering the *beiram*, you had to profess Mohammedanism. But, tell me, has your heart, like your lips, been capable of rejecting a religion that allows me to love you? And for whom are you abandoning a religion that ought to be so dear to us? For a wretch, still marked by the chains he has worn, who if he were a man, would be the lowliest of them all!"

"My brother," she said, "the man of whom you speak is my husband. I must honor him, however unworthy he seem to you; I, too, would be the lowliest of women if . . ."

"Ah, sister mine," I said, "you are a Gheber. He is not your husband nor can he be. If you are faithful like your forefathers, you ought see in him only a monster."

"Alas," she said, "how distant that religion seems to me! Scarcely had I learned its precepts when I had to forget them. You can hear that this language I am speaking is no longer familiar to me and that I am having great trouble in expressing myself. But know that the memory of our childhood still enchants me and that since that time, I have had only false pleasures, that no day has passed without my thinking of you, that you had more to do with my marriage than you think, and that I decided to go through with it, finally, only in the hopes of seeing you again. But how dearly that fatal day, which has already cost me so much, will cost me again! I see you completely beside yourself; my husband is quaking with rage and jealousy. I shall see you no more; I am surely speaking to you for the last time in my life. If this were so, dear brother, that life would not last long." With these words, she broke down, and realizing that she was incapable of carrying on our conversation, she left me there, the most desperate of men.

Three or four days later, I asked to see my sister. The barbarous eunuch would very much have liked to keep me from it. But in addition to the fact that this sort of husband does not hold over wives the same sort of authority as do others, he loved my sister so desperately that he could refuse her nothing. I saw her again in the same place and under the same veils, accompanied by two slaves. This made me fall back again on our private language. "My sister," I said, "how does it come about that I cannot see you without finding myself in a dreadful state? The walls that hold you enclosed, these bolts and these bars, these wretched guardians observing you, set me into a fury. How can you have lost that sweet freedom enjoyed by your ancestors? Your mother, who was so chaste, gave to her husband for sole guaranty of her virtue, that virtue itself. They lived happily, both of them, in mutual understanding, and the simplicity of their way of life was to

them wealth a thousandfold more precious than the empty brilliance you seem to enjoy in this sumptuous house. By losing your religion, you have lost your freedom, your happiness, and that precious equality which did honor to your sex. But what is far worse is that you are not the wife —for you could not be—but the slave of a slave who has been degraded from humanity."

"Ah, my brother," she said, "respect my husband, and respect the religion I have accepted. According to that religion, I cannot listen to you or speak to you without committing a crime."

"What!" I said, utterly overcome. "So, my sister, you believe that religion to be the true one?"

"Alas," said she, "how much better for me were it not! I am making for its sake too great a sacrifice to be able not to believe it, and if my doubts . . ." On these words she grew silent.

"Yes, my sister, your doubts, whatever they be, are well founded. What can you expect from a religion that makes you unhappy in this world and gives you no hope for the next? Remember that ours is the most ancient religion in the world; that it has always flourished in Persia and has no other origin than this empire, whose beginnings are lost to knowledge; that it is not chance that introduced Mohammedanism here; and that that sect was established not by persuasion but by conquest. If our native princes had not been weak, you would still see the cult of the ancient Magi in power here. Go back in your mind to those far past centuries; everything will bear witness to the Magi, and nothing to the Mohammedan sect, which several thousands of years later was only in its infancy."

"But," she protested, "even if my religion is more recent than yours, it is at least purer, for it adores only God, whereas you adore also the Sun, the Stars, Fire, and even the Elements."

"I can see, sister mine, that among the Mohammedans, you have learned to blaspheme our religion. We adore neither the Stars nor the Elements, and our fathers have never adored them. They have never built temples to them and never offered sacrifice to them. They have only devoted to them religious services, albeit inferior ones, as befitting the works and manifestations of the Divinity.[132] But, sister, in the name of God, who enlightens us, accept

from me this holy book I bear. It is the book of our lawgiver Zoroaster. Read it without suspicion. Gather into your heart the rays of light which will inform you as you read it. Be mindful of your fathers, who have for so long honored the Sun in the holy city of Balkh,[133] and finally, remember me, for I have no hope of repose, fortune, or life save in your conversion." I left her in complete transport and allowed her to decide, alone, the most weighty matter I could ever have in my life.

I returned two days later. I did not address a word to her. I awaited in silence the sentence of my life or my death. "My brother," she said, "you are loved, and by a Gheber. I have struggled long. But, O gods, how love does lift difficulties! How relieved I am! I am no longer afraid of loving you too much; I can no longer set limits to my love; its very excess is lawful. Ah, how well all this befits the state of my heart! But you, who knew how to break the chains my mind had forged for itself, when will you break those that tie my hands? From this moment on, I give myself to you. Let me see by the haste with which you accept me, how dear this present is to you. O my brother, I believe that the first time I can embrace you, I shall die in your arms."

I could not possibly express the joy I felt on hearing those words. All at once, I thought myself, I beheld myself, in effect, the happiest of all men. I saw nearly satisfied all the desires I had formed in twenty-five years of life, and I felt disappearing all the woes that had made it so heavy. But once I had become accustomed a bit to such sweet notions, I found that I was not as close to my happiness as I had imagined in the first moment, although I had hurdled the greatest of all the obstacles. I had to take her guardians by surprise.* I dared confide to no soul the secret of my life. I had only my sister; she had only me. If I failed in my attempt, I ran the risk of being impaled, but I could envisage no punishment more cruel than failure. We agreed that she would send me to ask for a clock that her father had left her and that I should put in it a chisel, to saw away the grillwork of a window opening on the street, and a knotted cord to help her down. It was also agreed that I should henceforth not visit her, but that I should go every night under that window to await her first opportunity to carry out the plan. I spent

two whole weeks without seeing anyone, for she had not found the propitious moment. Finally, on the next night, I heard a saw at work. From time to time the work was interrupted, and during these intervals, my fright was inexpressible. After an hour's work I saw her attaching the cord; she let go and slid down into my arms. I no longer knew the meaning of danger, and I remained a long time without moving from the spot. I spirited her away outside the city, where I had a horse all ready to travel. I put her behind me on the horse and fled with the greatest haste imaginable from a place that could be so dangerous for us. Before dawn we arrived at the house of a Gheber in a deserted spot where he had withdrawn to live frugally from the labor of his hands. We did not deem it proper to remain with him, and on his advice, we went into a thick forest and hid away in the hollow trunk of an old oak until the rumor of our escape had subsided. We lived together in this isolated place, with no witnesses and repeating to each other continually that we should love each other always, all the while awaiting the proper moment when some Gheber priest could perform the marriage ceremony prescribed by our sacred books. "Oh, my sister," I would say to her, "how holy is this union! Nature has already joined us, now our holy law is going to join us again." Finally a priest came to calm our amorous impatience. In a peasant's house, he performed all the marriage ceremonies. He blessed us and wished us a thousand times all the strength of Vishtaspa and all the holiness of Aurvataspa.[134] Soon afterward, we left Persia, where we were not safe, and withdrew to Georgia. We lived there for a year; each day we were more enchanted with each other, but since my money was about gone and as I feared the effects of penury on my sister, although not on myself, I left her to go seek help from our relatives. Never has there been a more tender leave-taking. But my trip was not only of no help, it was disastrous. For, having discovered, on the one hand, that all our possessions were confiscated, and on the other, that my relatives were incapable of helping me, I came away only with precisely what I needed for the return trip. But what, then, was my despair? I did not find my sister upon my return! Some days before, Tatars had raided the city where she was, and since they found her beautiful, they took her away—leaving behind

only a little baby girl of which she had been delivered some months before—and sold her to some Jews who were going to Turkey. I followed these Jews and caught up with them after three leagues. My prayers, my tears were vain. They asked thirty tomans[135] and never wavered over a single one. After I had turned to everyone, and implored the protection of Turkish and Christian priests, I finally addressed myself to an Armenian merchant. I sold him my daughter and myself for thirty-five tomans. I went to the Jews and gave them their thirty tomans, taking the other five to my sister, whom I had not yet seen. "You are free, sister," I told her, "and I can now embrace you. Here are five tomans I bring you. I am sorry I was not purchased at a higher price."

"What," she cried, "you have sold yourself?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Ah, unhappy man, what have you done? Was I not already miserable enough without your laboring to make me more so? Your freedom was a consolation to me, but your enslavement will bring me to my tomb. Ah, brother mine, how cruel is your love! And my daughter? Where is she? I don't see her."

"I have sold her, too," I replied.

We both melted into tears, and neither had the strength to say more to the other. At last, I went to find my master, and my sister arrived almost as soon as I. She threw herself at his knees: "I ask enslavement of you," she said, "in the same way that other people beg for freedom. Take me. You will sell me at a price higher than the price of my husband." It was then that there arose a struggle between us which dragged tears from my master's eyes. "Unhappy wretch!" she said to me. "Did you think I could accept my freedom at the expense of your own? My lord, you see before you two unhappy beings who will die if you separate them. I am giving myself to you. Pay me. Perhaps one day that money and my services will bring you to grant what I dare not now ask of you. It is to your benefit not to separate us; you must know that his life is at my command."

The Armenian was a gentle man who was touched by our misfortune. "Serve me," he said, "both of you, faithfully and zealously, and I promise that in a year I shall grant you your freedom. I can see that neither of you

deserves the unhappiness of your lot. If when you are free, you are happy as you deserve to be, if fortune smiles upon you, I am sure you will compensate the loss I have suffered." We both embraced his knees and followed him in his travels. We both took comfort in the work of our servitude, and I was delighted whenever I had managed to accomplish the tasks that had fallen to my sister's lot.

The end of the year came. My master held to his word and freed us. We returned to Tiflis. There I found a former friend of my father who was successfully practicing medicine in that city. He lent me some money, with which I carried on some trading. Later, business took me to Smyrna, where I settled. I have been living here for six years now, enjoying the most lovable and gentle fellowship in the world. Union reigns in my family, and I should not change my place for that of any of this world's kings. I have been fortunate enough to see again the Armenian merchant to whom I owe it all, and I have repaid him with conspicuous service.

From Smyrna, the 27th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1714.

LETTER LXVIII

Rica to Usbek in ——

The other day I went to dinner at the home of a man of law who had several times invited me. After conversing with him on many subjects, I said to him: "Sir, your profession strikes me as being a very troublesome one."

"Not as much so as you might think," he replied. "The way we go about it, it is simple fun."

"But don't you always have your head jammed full with other people's troubles? Are you not always occupied with things that are not the slightest bit interesting?"

"You are right," he replied, "these things are not interesting to us at all, for we ourselves take not the slightest interest in them, and by that very reason our profession is not as tiring as you say." When I saw that he was taking the matter so lightheartedly, I said: "Sir, I have never seen your office."

"I should think not, for I haven't any. When I took this

practice, I needed money to pay for it. I sold my library and the bookdealer left me, out of a tremendous number of volumes, with only my account book. Not that I miss them; we judges don't stuff ourselves with empty knowledge. What do we need with all those law books? Practically all the cases are hypothetical and do not conform to the general rule."

"But couldn't that be, sir, because you make them cease to conform to any general rule? For, after all, why should there exist laws among all the peoples of the world if they did not have a practical application? And how can you apply them if you don't know what they are?"

"If you knew the law court," replied my magistrate, "you would not be talking as you are. We possess living books, that is to say, lawyers. They work for us and are responsible for instructing us."

"And aren't they sometimes also responsible for deceiving you?" I rejoined. "You would do well to protect yourselves against their snares. They have arms with which they attack your justice. It would be a good thing for you to have some to defend it, a good thing not to go lightly dressed to battle people armed to the teeth."

From Paris, the 13th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1714.

LETTER LXIX

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

You could never have imagined that I should turn more metaphysician than I already was. And yet that's what has happened; you will be convinced of it once you have endured this outburst of my philosophy.

The most reasonable philosophers who have reflected on the nature of God have held that he is a being completely perfect, but they have sorely abused that idea. They have made an enumeration of all the different perfections that man is capable of having or imagining and have weighed down their notion of the divinity with them, without reflecting that often these attributes are mutually restrictive and that they cannot exist in the same being without destroying one another.

Poets of the West say that a painter[136] who wanted to make the portrait of the goddess of beauty assembled the most beautiful Greek women and took from each her most pleasing feature, from which he reconstituted an entity that he believed to resemble the most beautiful of all the goddesses. If a man had tried to conclude from this that she was blonde as well as brunette and that she had both black eyes and blue eyes, that she was haughty as well as tender, he would have been taken for a fool.

Often God is lacking in one perfection that would be capable of endowing him with a great imperfection. But he is never limited save by himself. He is his own necessity. Thus, although God is omnipotent, he cannot break his promises nor can he deceive mankind. Often the impotence is most likely to be* not in him, but in related things, and that is why he cannot change the essence of things.

Thus it is not surprising that some of our doctors have dared to deny the infinite prescience of God on the grounds that it is incompatible with his justice.

However daring this idea may be, metaphysics lends itself very well to it.* According to its principles, it is not possible for God to foresee things that depend upon the determining factors of free causes, for that which has not yet happened does not exist, and consequently, cannot be known. For a nothing, totally lacking in properties, cannot be perceived. God * cannot read in a will that does not exist, nor see in a soul something that is not in it. For until it be determined, the action that determines the soul is certainly not in it.

The soul is the artisan of its own determination. But there are occasions when it is so undetermined that it doesn't even know in which direction to determine itself. Often it does so only to make use of its freedom in such a way that God cannot see that determination in advance —neither in the action of the soul nor in the action made upon it by exterior objects.

How could God foresee things that depend upon the determination of free causes? He could see them in only two ways: by conjecture, which is contradictory to his infinite prescience, or else as necessary effects following infallibly upon a cause that infallibly causes them. And this is even more contradictory. For then the free soul would

be free only by supposition, and in fact, would be no more free than is a billiard ball to move when pushed by another.

Do not, however, for one moment believe that I am trying* to limit the knowledge of God. Since he causes his creatures to move at his fancy, he knows all he wants to know. But even though he can see everything, he does not always use this faculty. Normally he leaves to his creature the faculty of acting or not acting, in order to leave to the creature the possibility of merit or demerit. It is then that he gives up his right of acting upon the creature or determining that action. But when he wants to know something, he knows it from all time, for he has only to will that it happen as he sees it and to determine his creatures in conformity with his will. Thus it is that he draws forth what is to happen from the number of purely possible things by fixing with his decree the future determinations of minds and by depriving them of the power he has granted them either to act or not to act.[137]

If one is permitted a comparison in a matter that is far above comparison: a monarch does not know what his envoy will do in an important matter. If he wants to know, he has only to order his envoy to act in just such a way and then he can give assurance that things will turn out as he planned them.

The Koran* and the books of the Jews are forever in conflict with the dogma of absolute prescience. In these texts, God seems* to be without knowledge of the future determination of minds. This would seem to be the first truth taught to men by Moses.

God puts Adam in a terrestrial paradise with the proviso that he not eat of a certain fruit:* an absurd rule in a being who is supposed to know the future dispositions of the soul. For can such a being attach conditions to his favors* without making them ludicrous? It is as if a man who already knew of the capture of Baghdad would say to another: "I wager you one hundred tomans* that Baghdad will be taken." Wouldn't that be a rather poor joke?

My dear Rhedi,* why so much philosophy? God is so sublime that we cannot even perceive his clouds. We know him well only through his precepts. He is immense, spiritual, infinite. May his grandeur bring us back to a

realization of our weakness. Always humiliating the self means adoring him always.[138]

From Paris, the last of the
Moon of Shahban, 1714.

LETTER LXX *

Zelis to Usbek in Paris

Soliman, whom you love, is despondent over an insult he has just received. A young empty-head, by the name of Suphis, had been trying for three months to win his daughter in marriage. He seemed satisfied with the girl's face on the report and portrait drawn of her by women who had seen her during her childhood. The dowry had been agreed upon, and everything had gone off without any difficulty. Yesterday, after the first ceremonies, the young lady left by horse, accompanied by her eunuch and veiled, according to custom, from head to foot. But the moment she arrived before the house of her future husband, he had the door shut on her and vowed that he would never receive her unless the dowry were raised. Relatives from both families came quickly to straighten out the matter, and after much resistance, Soliman agreed * to make a small present to his son-in-law. The final ceremonies of the marriage were performed, and the young woman was carried to the nuptial bed with considerable violence. But an hour later, the madcap arose furiously; claiming that she was not a virgin, he slashed her face in several places, and sent her back to her father. It is impossible for any man to be more shocked than he is by this insult. There are some people who hold that the girl is innocent. How miserable the lot of fathers to be exposed to such affronts![139] If my daughter were to receive similar treatment, I think I should die of grief.

Farewell.

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 9th
of the Moon of Gemmadi I, 1714.

LETTER LXXI *

Usbek to Zelis

I pity Soliman, all the more so since his misfortune is without remedy and since his son-in-law has done no more than make use of the prerogative of the law. I find that law very harsh to thus expose the honor of a whole family to the fancy of a fool. It can be said as much as one likes that there are certain signs for knowing the truth;* this is an old error that we have gotten over among ourselves these days; our medical doctors give incontrovertible reasons for the uncertainty of proof. Even the Christians look upon such proofs as illusory, though they are clearly established * in their sacred books and even though their ancient lawgiver[140] made the innocence or the condemnation of all their young women depend on them.

I learn with satisfaction of the care you are taking with the education of your daughter. May God grant that her husband find her as beautiful and as pure as Fatima. May she have ten eunuchs to watch over her; may she be the honor and the attraction of the seraglio to which she is destined. May she have over her head only ceilings of gold; may she walk only on sumptuous carpets. And, as the crown to my wishes, may my eyes see her in all her glory!

From Paris, the 5th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1714.

LETTER LXXII

Rica to Usbek in ——

I found myself the other day amid a group of people where I saw a man extremely satisfied with himself. In one quarter of an hour, he made decisions on three questions of ethics, four historical problems, and five points of natural philosophy. I have never seen a more universal decider; his mind was never kept in suspension by the least doubt.[141] We dropped the sciences and talked of current events; he made decisions on them. I wanted to catch him up and I said to myself: "I'll have to get back

to my own field; I shall take refuge in my own country." So I talked to him about Persia. But scarcely had I spoken four words when he had already corrected me twice, basing himself on the authority of Messieurs Tavernier and Chardin.[142] "Ah! great heavens!" I said to myself, "what manner of man is this? Pretty soon he'll know all the streets of Ispahan better than I do myself." I resolved my strategy promptly: I remained silent. I let him do the talking, and he is still deciding.

From Paris, the 8th of the
Moon of Zilcade, 1715.

LETTER LXXIII

Rica to ——

I have heard people talk about a kind of tribunal called the French Academy. There is no other so little respected in the whole world, for it is said that as soon as it has made a decision, the people break its decrees and impose on it laws that it is obliged to follow.

Some time ago, in order to solidify its authority, it laid down a digest of opinions.[143] This offspring of so many fathers was almost ancient when it was born, and although legitimate, was nearly stifled at its birth by a bastard child that had already appeared.[144]

Those who make up the body have no other function than to chatter endlessly. Praise fits into their jargon as if of its own accord, and as soon as they are initiated into its mysteries, the frenzy of panegyric seizes upon them, nevermore to part.

This body has forty heads completely stuffed with figures of speech, metaphors, and antitheses. So many mouths rarely speak save by exclamation. Its ears are ever eager to be struck by cadence and harmony. As for its eyes, there is no need to mention them; they seem to have been made for talking—not seeing. It is not sure of foot, for time, which is its scourge, shakes it continually and destroys all it has accomplished. Formerly it was said that its hands were itching for gain. I shall make no comment on this matter to you and entrust the problem to those who know that body better than I.

These are things, ——, we never see in Persia. Our minds are not occupied with such strange and singular establishments. We are always in search of nature in our simple customs and unsophisticated manners.

From Paris, the 27th of the
Moon of Zilhage, 1715.

LETTER LXXIV

Usbek to Rica in* ——

Several days ago a gentleman of my acquaintance said to me: "I promised to produce you in the proper homes of Paris; I shall now take you to the house of a great noble, one of the most exemplary men of this kingdom."

"What does that mean, sir? Is he more polite, more affable than the others?"

"No," he replied.

"Ah, I understand: he makes everyone conscious at all times of the superiority he commands over all who draw near him. If that is the case, I have no need to go there. I grant him his superiority without limitation and admit my shortcomings."

However, I had to go through with it, and I saw a little man so proud, who took his pinch of snuff with such haughtiness, wiped his nose so ruthlessly, spat with so much phlegm, petted his dogs in a way so insulting to men, that I could not cease admiring him. "Ah, good God," I said to myself, "if I were to play a role like that at the Persian court, I should be the model of a great fool." We would have had to be born with a very bad innate character, Rica, to manage to hand out a hundred little insults to people who came to see us every day to show their good will. They knew perfectly well that we were above them, and if they had been unaware of it, our courtesies would have disclosed as much to them every day. Having no need to assure ourselves of being respected, we did all we could to make ourselves liked. We spoke to the lowliest of them; in the midst of grandeur, which always tends to harden a man, they found us sensitive. They saw only our hearts above them; we descended

to their needs. But when we had to support the majesty of the prince in public ceremony, when we had to make our nation respected by foreigners, when, in fine, we had to encourage soldiers in dangerous situations, then we rose a hundred times higher than we had descended. We brought back pride to our countenance and we were sometimes considered to be rather good exemplars.

From Paris, the 10th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1715.

LETTER LXXV

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

I must confess that I have not noticed in Christians that lively conviction of religion which obtains among the Mohammedans. There is much distance with them between profession of faith and belief, between belief and conviction, and between conviction and practice. Religion is less a matter of holiness than an excuse for dispute, open to everyone. Courtiers, warriors, even women, rise up against ecclesiastics and demand that the churchmen prove what they are resolved never to believe. It's not a question of their being determined by reason nor is it a case of their having taken the trouble to examine the truth or falsehood of the religion they reject: these are rebels who have felt the yoke and shake it off before getting to know it. Thus they are no more certain of their disbelief than they are of their belief. They exist in an ebb and flow that carries them endlessly from one to the other. One of them told me one day: "I believe in the immortality of the soul by interval; my opinions are absolutely dependent on my physical constitution. Accordingly, as I possess more or less animal spirits, or as my stomach digests well or badly, as the air I breathe is fine or raw, as the food I eat is light or heavy, I am a Spinozist, a Socinian, a Catholic, a heathen, or a devout man. When the doctor is at my bedside, the confessor finds me much more co-operative. I know perfectly well how to keep religion from plaguing me when I feel well. But I allow it to console me when I am sick. When, in a given direction, I have nothing

more to hope for, religion appears and wins me over with its promises. I am quite willing to give myself over to it and die on the side of hope."

A long time ago Christian princes freed all their slaves from servitude because, they said, Christianity makes all men equal. It is true that this act of religion was very useful to them: they thereby humbled the great lords, from whose power they retrieved the common masses. Subsequently, they made conquests in countries where they saw it was to their advantage to have slaves; they allowed the buying and selling of them, oblivious of the principle of their religion which had so touched them.[145] How shall I put it? Truth in one era, falsehood in another. Why do we not do as the Christians! We are quite simple-minded to refuse business establishments and easy conquests in benign climates only because the water there is not sufficiently pure to allow us to wash according to the principles of the holy Koran! [146]

I render thanks unto the all-powerful God, who sent Ali, his great prophet, that I profess a religion that comes first before all human concerns, and that is as pure as the heaven from which it descended.

From Paris, the 13th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1715.

LETTER LXXVI

Usbek to his friend Ibben in Smyrna

European laws are merciless against those who take their own lives. They are made to die, so to speak, a second time. They are infamously dragged through streets; they are covered with ignominy; their possessions are confiscated.

It seems to me, Ibben, that such laws are quite unjust. When I am overwhelmed with grief, misfortune, scorn, why should they want to prevent me from putting an end to my troubles, and why cruelly deprive me of a remedy that lies in my own hands?

Why should they want me to go on working for a society of which I am no longer willing to be a part? Why should they insist, despite my feelings, that I hold to a

convention that has been made without my consent? Society is founded on mutual benefit.[147] But when it becomes a burden to me, who can keep me from renouncing it? Life was granted to me as a favor; therefore I can give it back when it is no longer one. The cause stops; the effect should therefore stop too.

Shall the prince desire that I be his subject when I receive no advantage from such subjection? Can my fellow citizens demand the unjust sharing of their utility and my despair? Can God, different from all other benefactors, wish to condemn me to accepting favors that overwhelm me?

I am obliged to follow the laws when I live under them. But when I no longer live under them, can they still bind me?

But, you will say, you are disturbing the order of providence. God has united your soul and your body and you are separating them. You are opposing his plan and you are resisting him.

What does all that mean? Am I disturbing the order of providence when I change the modifications of matter and square a ball which the primal laws of movement—that is to say, the laws of creation and conversation of matter—have made round? Certainly not, for I am only using a right given to me, and in this sense, I can disturb all of nature as much as I please without being told that I am obstructing providence.

When my soul is separated from my body, will there be less order and less arrangement in the universe? Do you believe that this new combination will be less perfect and less dependent on general laws? Do you think the world has lost something thereby? Or that the works of God will be less great, or, rather, less immense?

Do you believe that my body, having turned into an ear of grain, or a worm, or a piece of turf, will have turned into a work of nature less worthy of her? [148] Do you think that my soul, cut off from everything earthly it once possessed, has become less sublime?

All these ideas, my dear Ibben, have no other source than our pride. We do not feel our insignificance, and come what may, we want to be of value in the universe, to figure in it, to be an important object in it. We imagine that the destruction of a being as perfect as ourselves

would debase the whole of nature, and we cannot conceive that one man more or one man less in this world—what am I saying?—that all of mankind together, a hundred million earths* like our own, are but a thin and tenuous atom that God perceives only because of the vastness of his knowledge.[149]

From Paris, the 15th of the Moon of Saphar, 1715.

LETTER LXXVII *

Ibben to Usbek in Paris

My dear Usbek, it seems to me that for a true Mohammedan, misfortunes are not so much punishments as warnings. Those days that bring us to expiate our offenses are indeed precious. It is the prosperous times that we must cut short. What is the function of all our impatience if not to show that we should really like to be happy independently of him who grants felicity, for he is felicity itself?

If a being is made up of two beings, and if the necessity of preserving this union is better proof of submission to the commands of the Creator, a religious law could have been made therefrom. If the necessity of preserving this union constitutes a better guaranty of men's actions, then a civil law could have been made from it.[150]

From Venice, the last day of the Moon of Saphar, 1715.

LETTER LXXVIII

Rica to Usbek at ——

I am sending you a copy of a letter written here by a Frenchman in Spain. I think you will be very interested in seeing it.

> For six months now I have been traveling in Spain and Portugal and living among people who, with scorn for all others, do only the French the honor of hating them.
>
> Seriousness is the striking characteristic of both na-

tions.[151] It is visible chiefly in two ways: spectacles and mustaches.

Spectacles make it demonstrably clear that he who wears them is a man devoted to the sciences and buried in deep reading to a point where his sight has been weakened. Every nose that is either decorated or weighed down with them can be taken, without any chance of error, for the nose of a scholar.[152]

As to the mustache, it is to be respected for itself, independently of any consequences, although frequently it produces great benefits for the service of the prince and the honor of the nation, as a famous Portuguese general [153] made clear in the Indies. Finding himself in need of money, he cut off part of his mustache and on this forfeit sent a demand for twenty thousand pistoles from the inhabitants of Goa. First, the money was lent to him, and then he took back his mustache with honor.[154]

One can easily imagine that serious and phlegmatic peoples like these can have pride.* And they do. They base it generally on two quite considerable things. Those who live in continental Spain and Portugal feel their hearts extremely exalted when they are what is known as "old Christians," that is to say, when they are not sprung from those who in these past centuries were persuaded by the Inquisition to accept the Christian religion.[155] Those in the Indies are no less flattered when they consider that they possess the sublime merit of being, as they put it, "men of white flesh." There has never been a sultana in the seraglio of the Great Lord as proud of her beauty as the oldest and ugliest mongrel among them is of the olive whiteness of his skin when he is in some city of Mexico, seated in front of his door with his arms crossed. A gentleman of such consequence, a creature so perfect, would not work for all the treasure in the world, and would never bring himself, by any base and sordid employ, to compromise the honor and dignity of his skin.

For you must know that when a man has some merit in Spain (as, for example, when he can add to the qualities just mentioned, that of owning a great sword or of having learned from his father the art of making a discordant guitar talk),* he does no more work. His honor is concerned with the repose of his limbs. The man who remains seated ten hours a day receives precisely half as much again consideration as another who remains only five hours, because it is on chairs that noble titles are come by.[156]

Yet, although these invincible enemies of work make a show of philosophic tranquillity, they do not possess it in their hearts, for they are always in love. They are the first men in the world to die of languor under the windows of their mistresses. Any Spaniard without a cold could not possibly be taken for a gallant.

Above all, they are devout; next, they are jealous. They will take great pains not to expose their wives to the designs of a soldier riddled with wounds, or a decrepit judge; but they will closet them away with a fervent novice who lowers his eyes, or a robust Franciscan who raises his.

They allow* their women to appear with uncovered bosom, but they don't want their heels to be seen or the toes of their feet to be taken by surprise.

Everywhere it is said that love's rigors are cruel. They are even more so for Spaniards. The women cure them of their distress, but they only make them change one for the other, for they often retain a long and painful memory of a dead passion.[157]

They possess little polite touches that would seem out of place in France: for example, a captain never whips his soldier without first asking his permission, and the Inquisition never has a Jew burned without apologizing to him.

The Spaniards who are not burned seem so attached to the Inquisition that it would bespeak ill will to take it away from them. I should only like to see them start another one, not against the heretics but against those heresiarchs who attribute to piddling monastic practices the same efficacity as to the seven sacraments, who adore everything they venerate, and who are so devout that they are scarcely Christians.

You can find wit and common sense among the Spanish, but don't look for any in their books. Consider one of their libraries: novels on one side, the Schoolmen on the other. You would surmise that the divisions had been made and the whole put together by some secret enemy of human reason.

The only single one of their books which is good is the one that holds up all the others to ridicule.[158]

They have made immense discoveries in the New World, and they still do not know their own continent. On their rivers there are ports* not yet discovered, and in their mountains, peoples that to them are still unknown.[159] *

They say that the sun rises and sets over their coun-

try, but it must be added that as it makes its course it encounters only ruined farmland and desolate countryside.

I should not be loath, Usbek, to see a letter written to Madrid by a Spaniard traveling in France. I believe he would quite well avenge his nation. What a vast field of endeavor for a detached and thoughtful man! I can imagine his starting a description of Paris thus:

"There is here a house where madmen are put. One might at first believe it is the biggest one in the city. Not at all! The remedy is indeed small, given the proportions of the disease. Doubtless these Frenchmen, so descried by their neighbors, shut up a few madmen in a house in order to convince people that those outside are not mad."

I leave my Spaniard there.[160]

Adieu, my dear Usbek.

From Paris, the 17th of the Moon of Saphar, 1715.

LETTER LXXIX

The grand eunuch to Usbek in Paris*

Yesterday some Armenians brought to the seraglio a young Circassian slave they were trying to sell. I had her shown into the secret apartments, undressed her, and examined her with the eyes of a judge. The more I examined, the more charms I found. A virginal modesty seemed to want to hide them from my view. I could see the efforts it cost her to obey. She blushed upon finding herself nude, even in front of me, and after all, because I am exempt from those passions capable of alarming modesty, I am unaroused by the dominion of her sex. Being the minister of modesty, I bring to bear even on the freest actions only the purest glances, and I am capable of inspiring only innocence.

As soon as I had judged her worthy of you, I lowered my eyes and threw a scarlet mantle over her. I put a gold ring on her finger, knelt down at her feet, and adored her as the queen of your heart. I paid off the Armenians and removed her from all human view. Happy Usbek! You possess more beauties than are enclosed in all the palaces of the Orient. What joy for you on your return to find

all that Persia can offer in the way of ravishing beauty and to see charm being reborn in your seraglio as fast as time and possession work to destroy it.

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 1st of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1715.

LETTER LXXX

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Since I have been in Europe, my dear Rhedi, I have seen many governments. It is not like Asia, where the rules of politics are always the same.

I have often sought to find out which system of government was* most in conformity with human reason. It seemed to me that the most perfect is that government which gets things done with the least expense, and that therefore the government that leads men in the manner most appropriate to their leanings and inclinations is the most perfect.[161]

If under a gentle government, the nation is as submissive as under a strict government, then the first is preferable, since it is more in conformity with reason whereas severity is a motive foreign to it.

Be assured, my dear Rhedi, that in a state the degree of cruelty of punishment does not cause people to obey the laws more. In countries where punishment is moderate, the laws are respected just as well as in those where punishment is tyrannous and frightful.

Whether the government be gentle or cruel, punishment is always meted out by degree. A crime more or less serious calls for the infliction of a punishment more or less serious. One's imagination, of its own accord, conforms to the customs of the country where one is:* a week of prison or a light fine impresses a European, brought up under a gentle government, as much as the loss of an arm frightens an Asiatic. They attach a certain degree of fear to a certain degree of punishment, and each man couples them in his own way. The despair of losing his reputation will literally torment a Frenchman sentenced to the selfsame punishment that would make a Turk lose scarcely a quarter hour's sleep.[162]

Moreover, I cannot see that civil order, justice, and equity are better observed in Turkey, Persia, and among the Mongols than they are in the republics of Holland and Venice and even in England. I cannot see that fewer crimes are committed or that men, intimidated by the degree of punishment, are more submissive to the law.[163]

On the contrary, I note a source of injustice and vexation at the center of these very states.

I find that even the prince, who is the law itself, is less master than anywhere else.

I can see that in times of stress there are always tumultuous movements when no one is the chief of state, and that once a cruel authority is scorned, no one retains enough authority to bring it back.

I observe that the despair of ever achieving impunity justifies disorder and makes it greater; that, in such states, there is never a minor revolt and never an interval between muttering and open sedition; that great events are not necessarily prepared by great causes. On the contrary, the least accident can produce a great revolution, often quite as unforeseen by those who make it as by those who suffer its consequences.[164]

When Osman, emperor of the Turks, was dethroned, none of those who committed the overthrow planned to do so. They simply came as suppliants to demand justice on some complaint. A voice, never identified, rose from the crowd by chance; the name of Mustafa was spoken; and, suddenly, Mustafa was emperor.[165]

From Paris, the 2nd of the
Moon of Rebiab I, 1715.

LETTER LXXXI

Nargum, envoy from Persia to Muscovy, to Usbek in Paris

Of all the nations in the world, my dear Usbek, there is none that has surpassed the Tatars either in glory or in scope of conquest. That tribe is the real ruler of the universe. All others seem made to serve it. It is equally founder and destroyer of empires. From time immemorial, it has given proof of its power upon the earth; in every age, it has been the scourge of nations.

The Tatars conquered China twice,[166] and they still hold it under their sway.

They rule over the vast countries that form the empire of the Mogul.

Masters of Persia, they sit upon the thrones of Cyrus and of Vishtaspa.[167] They have subjected Muscovy. Under the name of Turks, they have made immense conquests in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and they rule over these three parts of the universe.

To speak of more remote times, from them arose some* of the races that overthrew the Roman Empire.

What are Alexander's conquests in comparison to those of Genghis Khan?

That victorious nation lacked only historians to celebrate the memory of its marvels.[168]

How many immortal feats have been buried in oblivion! How many empires whose very origin we ignore were founded by this race! That warrior nation solely intent on present glory, certain of conquering in every age, never thought of marking itself out in the future by the memory of its past triumphs.

From Moscow, the 4th of the
Moon of Rebiab I, 1715.

LETTER LXXXII

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

Although Frenchmen talk a lot, there is among them nonetheless a group of silent dervishes, called Carthusians. It is said that they cut their tongues upon entering the monastery; one might wish strongly that all the other dervishes would cut off in like manner anything that their calling renders useless.

As to quiet people, there are some even stranger than those mentioned, and with a quite extraordinary talent. These are the ones who know how to speak without saying anything, who take over and hold a conversation at bay during two hours without its being possible to expose them, copy them, or retain a single word of what they have said.

People of this sort are adored by women, but not adored as much as some others, who have received from nature

the pleasing gift of smiling at the right time—that is, every minute—and who ornament everything the women say with the charm of joyous approbation.

But they are at the summit of human wit when they know how to extend finesse to every single thing and to find a thousand little ingenious witticisms in the commonest.

I know still others who have found the knack of introducing inanimate objects into their conversations and who make their embroidered jackets, blond wigs, canes, and gloves talk for them. It is advisable to start right at the street by having your carriage noise heard, as well as the hammer knocking violently at the door. These preliminary remarks prepare for the rest of the oration, and when the prelude is fine, it makes all stupidities that come after it tolerable, for luckily they come too late.

I can promise you that these small talents, which we don't make anything of in our country, do good service to those here who are fortunate enough to have them; further, a reasonable man can scarcely scintillate in their company.

From Paris, the 6th of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1715.

LETTER LXXXIII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

If there is a God, Rhedi, of necessity he must be just, for if he were not, he would be the most evil and imperfect of all beings.

Justice is a true relationship of appropriateness which exists between two things, and this relationship is always the same, no matter by whom considered, whether it be God, or an angel, or finally, a man.

It is true that men do not always see these relationships. Often even, when they do see them, they draw away from them; their own profit is always what they see most clearly. Justice raises her voice, but she has trouble being heard amid the tumult of passions.

Men are capable of doing injustice because it is to their own interest to do so, and because they prefer their own satisfaction to that of others. It is always by reference to

themselves that they act; no man is evil gratuitously. There must be some determinant reason; that reason is always a selfish one.

But it is not possible that God should ever do anything unjust. By the very fact that we can suppose he sees justice, he must necessarily follow it, for since he needs nothing and is sufficient unto himself, he would otherwise be the most wicked of all beings, for he would be so with no incentive.

Thus, even were there to be no God, we should always love justice—that is to say, do our best to resemble that being of whom we have such a beautiful idea, who if he were to exist, would be, of necessity, just. Free though we might be from the yoke of religion, we ought never to be free from that of equity.

That, Rhedi, is what made me think that justice is eternal and not dependent on the conventions of men. If it should so depend, this would be a horrible truth that we should have to hide from ourselves.

We are surrounded by men stronger than ourselves. They could harm us in myriad different ways and three fourths of the time could get away with it unpunished. What a relief to know that in the hearts of all these men there exists an interior principle that fights in our favor and protects us from their machinations! [169]

Without that principle, we should be in continual dread: we should walk in front of men as before lions and we should never for a second feel secure about* our wealth, our honor, or our life.

All these reflections have aroused me against those learned doctors who represent God as a being who uses his power tyrannically, who cause him to act as we should not like to act ourselves for fear of offending him, who weigh him down with all the imperfections he punishes in us, and who in their contradictory notions, make him sometimes an evil being, sometimes a being who hates evil and punishes it.

When a man performs a self-examination, what satisfaction for him to realize that he has a just heart! This pleasure, sober as it may be, must delight him. He finds that his being is elevated as much above those without one as he is elevated above tigers and bears. Yes, Rhedi, if I were sure of always following inviolably that equity which

I have before my eyes, I should think myself the foremost among men.

From Paris, the 1st of the
Moon of Gemmadi I, 1715.

LETTER LXXXIV

Rica to ——

Yesterday I visited the Invalides.[170] If I were a prince, I should like to have built that establishment every bit as much as to have won three battles. Everywhere in that building the hand of a great monarch is to be seen. I believe that it is the place most worthy of respect on the earth.

What a sight to see gathered together in the same place all these victims of their country, who draw breath only to defend it, and who, feeling the same spirit if not the same strength, complain only of their present inability to sacrifice themselves again for it.

What can be more admirable than to see these weakened warriors observe in their retirement a discipline as exacting as if they were forced to it by the presence of an enemy? What more admirable than to see them seek their final satisfaction in this image of war and to divide heart and mind between the duties of religion and the duties of warfare.

I should like to see the names of those who die for country preserved in temples and inscribed in registers that would become, as it were, the wellspring of glory and nobility.

From Paris, the 15th of the
Moon of Gemmadi I, 1715.

LETTER LXXXV

Usbek to Mirza in Ispahan

You know, Mirza, that some of Shah Suleiman's[171] ministers had formed the plan of forcing all Armenians in Persia to leave the realm or become Mohammedans, with the idea in mind that our empire would always be polluted as long as it kept the heathen in our midst.[172]

Persian greatness would have come to an end if blind religious devotion had had its way on that occasion.

It is not known why the project failed:[173] neither those who proposed it nor those who rejected it ever knew the train of events. Chance fulfilled the office of reason and policy, and saved the empire from a greater peril than it would have been exposed to by the loss of a battle* and the capture of two cities.

By proscribing the Armenians, they were within an ace of destroying, in one single day, all the businessmen and almost all the artisans of the realm. I am sure that the great Shah Abbas would rather have had both arms cut off than have signed such an order, and that he would have considered sending his most industrious subjects to the Mogul and other kings of the Indies tantamount to giving them half of his states.[174]

The persecutions made by our zealous Mohammedans at the expense of the Ghebers forced the latter to migrate en masse to the Indies, and thus deprived Persia of that people* so diligent in husbandry that, by itself, it was in a position to conquer the sterility of our soil.

There remained only this second attempt for religious devotion to fall back on: that is, to destroy industry, in consequence of which the empire would have fallen apart of its own accord, and along with it, of necessity, the very religion that the zealots wanted to make so flourishing.

If I must reason straightforwardly, Mirza, I'm not sure that it wouldn't be a good thing for a state to have several religions.

It can be seen that those who live in religions that are only tolerated usually make themselves more helpful to their country than those living under the majority religion, and this because, shut off from official honors and able to distinguish themselves only by their opulence and wealth, they are motivated to acquire the latter by their hard work and to take over the most distasteful chores of society.

Moreover, since every religion contains some precepts useful to society, it is right that each should be observed with devotion. Now what could be better calculated to animate such devotion than the multiplicity of religions?

Religions are rivals willing to forgive nothing. Their jealous pride comes down even to the individuals involved: each man is on his guard and is afraid of doing

anything to dishonor his party or expose it to the scorn and unforgivable censure of the opposite party.

Thus, it has always been noted that introducing a new sect into a state was the surest way of correcting the excesses of an older one.

People can say what they will about it not being to the prince's best interest to have several religions in his state. If every sect in the whole world were to forgather there, such a turn would do him no harm, for there is not one of them that does not prescribe obedience and preach submission.

I admit that history books are filled with wars of religion. But let us pay closer attention: it is certainly not the multiplicity of religions that produced such wars, it is, rather, the spirit of intolerance which animated the one that believed itself in the majority.

It is the spirit of proselytization, which the Jews have caught from the Egyptians, and which has passed from them, like a common epidemic, to the Mohammedans and to the Christians.[175]

It is, in fine, a spirit of intoxication, the progress of which can be counted only a total eclipse of human reason.

For, finally, were there no inhumanity involved in tyrannizing the conscience of others, even were there no ill effects germinating hundredfold therefrom, a man would still have to be mad to think of doing so. The man who wants to make me change my religion is doing so only because he would most certainly not change his own, even if someone tried to force him to. Thus, he finds it strange that I should not do something he would not do himself, even perhaps for the mastery of the whole world.

From Paris, the 26th of the
Moon of Gemmadi I, 1715.

LETTER LXXXVI

Rica to ——

It would appear that families are a government unto themselves. The husband has only a shade of authority over his wife; the father, over his children; the master, over his slaves.[176] Justice becomes involved in all their differences

of opinion,* and you may be sure that it is always against the jealous husband, the sullen father, the importunate master.

The other day I went into a place where justice is administered. Before getting there you must pass through the muster of an infinite number of young lady hawkers, who call to you with a deceptive tone of voice.[177] That part of the show to begin with is amusing enough, but it turns lugubrious when you go into the main chambers, where nothing is to be seen save a collection of people in dress as sober as their faces. Finally, you get into the sacred place where all the family secrets are disclosed and where the most secret actions are brought out into broad daylight.

Here a modest maid comes to confess the tortures of a too long preserved virginity—her struggles and painful resistance. She is so far from proud of her victory that she continually threatens to arrange a speedy downfall. So that her father might be aware of her needs, she discloses them to the whole populace.

Then comes an impudent woman to lay bare the insults she has heaped on her husband, as constituting good reason for being separated from him.

With similar modesty, there then comes another to say that she is weary of wearing the title of woman, with none of the pleasures. She has come to reveal the hidden mysteries of a marriage night; she would willingly be turned over to the scrutiny of the cleverest experts so that a ruling might re-establish her in all the prerogatives of virginity. There are even some who dare defy their husbands and demand of them in public an encounter that the presence of witnesses makes so difficult—a test as dishonoring for the woman who bears up under it as for the husband who succumbs to it.[178]

An endless number of ravished and seduced maidens make men appear much worse than they are. Love makes this court ring. One hears talk of nothing but angry fathers, ill-used maidens, unfaithful lovers, and sullen husbands.

According to the law observed, every child born during a marriage is perforce a child of the husband. He may have all the reasons in the world for not thinking so—the

law does his believing for him and relieves him of all inquiry and doubt.

In this court, votes are taken by majority, but it is said that* experience has shown that it would be better to take them by minority. And that is quite as it should be, for there are very few balanced minds, and everyone will agree that there is an infinity of false ones.

From Paris, the 1st of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1715.

LETTER LXXXVII

Rica to ——

They say that man is a sociable animal. At that rate it seems to me that a Frenchman is more of a man than any other. He is man personified, for he seems to be made only for society.

However, I have noticed among them, people who are not only sociable, but who also constitute in themselves a kind of universal society. They multiply in every corner; they populate the four corners of a city in the twinkling of an eye. One hundred men of this kind are more abundant than two thousand citizens. They could, in the eyes of a foreigner, repair the ravages of famine and plague. In philosophic schools, the question is asked whether a body can be in several places at the same time. These people are proof of what the philosophers put under question.

They are always in a hurry because they have the important business of asking all those they see where they are going and where they have come from.

You could never get it out of their heads that the proper thing to do is to pay visits to the whole public individually —without even counting the visits they make wholesale in places of general forgathering. But since these last visits are too limited in scope, they are counted for nothing in the rules of their ceremonial.

They weary a house door more with their bangs on the knocker than winds and storms. If one were to examine the calling lists of all the gatekeepers, one would find

their names there every day, crippled in a thousand different ways by the Swiss characters of the handwriting.[179] They pass their existence following up a funeral, in expressions of condolence, or in congratulations* of marriage. The King makes no gratuity to any one of his subjects without its costing these fellows the price of a carriage to go manifest their joy to the recipient. Finally, they come back home, tuckered out, only to rest in order to be able to take up their exhausting functions on the morrow.

The other day one of them died of fatigue, and this epitaph was placed on his tomb: "Here lies one who never rested. He was present at five hundred and thirty burials. He rejoiced over the birth of two thousand six hundred eighty children. The pensions granted his friends, for which he congratulated them, always with a different formula, add up to two million six hundred thousand livres. The trail he made over city pavements comes to nine thousand six hundred stadia; the distance covered in the country comes to thirty-six. His conversation was amusing; he had a ready-made fund of three hundred sixty-five tales to tell. In addition to this, from his earliest age, he possessed a stock of one hundred eighteen apothegms drawn from the ancients, which he used on brilliant occasions. He has finally died in the sixtieth year of his age. I grow silent, passing traveler. For how could I finish telling you all he did and saw?"

From Paris, the 3rd of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1715.

LETTER LXXXVIII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Liberty and equality reign in Paris. Birth, reputation, even military glory, however brilliant they be, will not save a man from the crowd in which he is lost. Jealousy over rank is unknown here. It is said that the first man of Paris is the one with the best horses for his carriage.

A great lord is a man who sees the King, who speaks to ministers, who has ancestors, debts, and annuities. If, on

top of that, he can hide his idleness by a semblance of eagerness or by a feigned predilection for pleasure, he will think himself the happiest of men.

In Persia the only great men are those to whom the monarch grants some part in the government. Here there are people who are great by birth, but who enjoy no reputation from it. Kings operate as do those skillful artisans who always use the simplest machines to complete their work.[180]

Preferment is the great divinity of Frenchmen. The minister is the high priest who offers up ample victims to that deity. Those surrounding him are not dressed in white: now sacrificers, now sacrificed, they, along with the whole population, dedicate themselves of their own accord to their idol.

From Paris, the 9th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1715.

LETTER LXXXIX

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna

The desire for fame is no different from the instinct for self-preservation possessed by all creatures.[181] It would appear that we enhance our being when we can carry it into the memory of others. It is like a new life acquired by us, one which becomes as precious as that which we received from heaven.

But since all men are not equally attached to life, they are also not equally sensitive to fame. This noble passion is certainly always engraved on their hearts, but education and imagination modify it in a thousand ways.

This difference, found among individuals, is even more clearly felt among nations.

It can be established as a maxim that, in each state, the desire for fame increases with the freedom of subjects and diminishes when freedom diminishes; fame is never a companion of servitude.

A man of common sense said to me the other day; "In many ways, men have more freedom in France than in Persia. Thus, fame is the more admired. This happy fancy causes a Frenchman to do with pleasure and relish what

your sultan extorts from his subjects only by exposing them continually to the prospect of punishments and rewards.

"Thus, with us, the prince is jealous of the honor of the least of his subjects. To safeguard it, there exist respected courts[182]—a sacred treasure of the nation, and the only one of which the sovereign is not master, for he could not be, without clashing with his own interests. Thus if some subject finds his honor wounded by his prince—whether by some show of preferment or by the least mark of scorn—he immediately leaves the prince's court, post, and service, and withdraws to his own estate.

"The difference between French troops and yours is that, in one case, they are made up of naturally cowardly slaves capable of rising above the fear of death only by the fear of punishment, which produces a new sort of terror in the soul and as it were, stupefies it; whereas, in our case, they offer themselves to every onslaught with delight and banish fear by means of a self-satisfaction superior to fear.[183]

"But the veritable sanctuary of honor, reputation, and virtue seems to be established in republics and in countries where the word 'fatherland' can be pronounced. In Rome, Athens, and Sparta[184] honor alone rewarded the most notable services. A crown of oak or laurel, a statue, an encomium, were vast recompense for a battle won or a city taken.

"In those cities a man who had performed a fine deed considered himself amply rewarded by the deed itself. He was incapable of looking upon one of his compatriots without feeling the pleasure of becoming his benefactor. He counted the number of his good deeds by the number of his fellow citizens. Every man is capable of doing good to one man, but it is like playing God to contribute to the well-being of a whole society.

"Now, must not such noble emulation be completely extinguished in the hearts of your Persians, for whom services and honors are but attributes of the sovereign's fancy? Fame and virtue are taken to be imaginary there unless accompanied by the prince's favor, for in it alone they have both birth and death. A man who has public esteem on his side is never sure he will not be dishonored

on the morrow. Today, here he is, general of the army; perhaps tomorrow the prince will make him a cook and allow him no more hope of future praise than that of having made a good stew."

From Paris, the 15th of the Moon of Gemmadi II, 1715.

LETTER XC

Usbek to the same in Smyrna

From this general passion of the French nation for fame, there has been formed in the minds of individuals a certain something called *point of honor.*[185] Properly speaking it is the character of every profession, but it is more obvious in men of war, and theirs is the point of honor par excellence. It would be difficult for me to make you feel what it is, for we have absolutely no idea of it.

In times past, Frenchmen, particularly the nobles, followed practically no other laws save those of this point of honor. They patterned the conduct of their whole life on these laws, which were so severe that it was impossible, without punishment crueler than death—I do not say to violate them—but even to evade their very slightest intention.

When it came to settling differences, these laws in effect prescribed only one method of decision; this was the duel, which neatly decided all difficulties. But what was bad about that was that judgment was often delivered between parties other than those directly involved.

However little a man might be known by another, he would have to get into the dispute and pay with his person exactly as if he himself had been angered. He always felt honored by such a choice and by a preference so flattering; a man who would not have been willing to give four pistoles to another to save him and his whole family from the gallows, had absolutely no qualms about going to risk his life for him a thousand times.[186]

This method of deciding cases was rather badly thought out, for if a man was more skillful or stronger than some other, it did not necessarily follow that he had better justification.[187]

And so kings forbade the practice under very severe punishment. But it was in vain. Honor, always eager to reign, revolts and recognizes no law.[188]

Thus Frenchmen are in a most extraordinary fix: the laws of honor oblige a gentleman to avenge himself when he has been offended, but, on the other hand, justice punishes him in the most cruel fashion for avenging himself. If one follows the laws of honor, he will die on the scaffold; if he follows the laws of justice, he is banished forever from the society of men. Thus, there remains only this cruel alternative: either to die, or to become unworthy of living.

From Paris, the 18th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1715.

LETTER XCI *

Usbek to Rustan in Ispahan

There has appeared here a person disguised as an ambassador of Persia, who is insolently making sport of the two greatest kings in the world.[189] He bears to the French monarch gifts that our monarch would not dare to give to a king of Imeretia or Georgia, and by his shameful avarice, he has thus dishonored the majesty of two empires.

He has made himself a laughingstock in front of people who pretend to be the most polite in Europe, and he has caused people to say in the West that the King of Kings reigns only over barbarians.

He has received honors that he seems to have deemed worthy of refusal for his own person. As if the court of France were more concerned with Persian greatness than himself, it has lent him the appearance of dignity before a people that feels only contempt for him.

Say nothing of this in Ispahan; spare the head of a miserable man. I should not like our ministers to punish him for their own imprudence and for the unworthy choice they have made.

From Paris, the last of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1715.

LETTER XCII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

The monarch who has reigned for so long is no more.[190] He made many people talk during his life; everyone was quiet at his death. Firm and courageous in this last moment, he appeared to surrender only to destiny. Just thus died the great Shah Abbas, after having filled the whole earth with his name.

Do not think this great event has caused only moral reflections to be uttered here. Every man thought of his own interests, concentrated upon drawing some profit from the change. The King, great-grandson of the defunct monarch, is only five years old; a prince, his uncle, has been declared regent of the realm.

The late king had made a will that limited the authority of the regent. That cunning prince went to the *Parlement,* and displaying all the rights of his birth,* had it break the intention of the dead monarch, who, desiring to survive himself, seemed to have had pretensions of still ruling even after his death.[191]

The *parlements* resemble ruins that are kicked about underfoot but that ever recall the idea of some famous temple celebrated by the ancient religion of nations. They perform practically no function now other than to administer justice, and their authority will go on steadily declining unless some unforeseen set of circumstances arrives to resuscitate their strength and life. These great bodies have followed the lot of things human. They have bowed before time, which destroys everything, before customs that have weakened all things, and before supreme authority, which has swept all before it.[192]

But the Regent, who wanted to make himself liked by the people, appeared at first to respect this image of public freedom, and as if he had counted upon re-erecting both temple* and idol after their fall, he wanted the *parlements* to be considered as the support of monarchy and the basis of all legitimate authority.

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1715.

LETTER XCIII

Usbek to his brother, santon[193] *at the monastery of Casbin*

I humble myself before thee, O holy brother, and I bow low; I look upon the prints of thy feet as upon the pupil of my eyes. Thy holiness is so great that thou seemest to possess the heart of our Holy Prophet, thy austerity surprises even heaven itself; the angels have looked upon thee from the height of glory and have said: "How is it that he is still upon earth when his spirit is with us and soars about the throne that rests upon the clouds?"

And how should I not honor thee, I who have learned from our doctors that dervishes, even infidels, wear ever the character of sanctity which makes them respected by the true believers and that God in all the ends of the earth has chosen for himself some souls purer than others, whom he has separated from the profane world so that their mortifications and fervent prayers might hold back his wrath, poised and ready to fall upon so many rebellious people?

Christians recount miracles about their first holy brothers, who took refuge by thousands in the frightful deserts of Thebes and had as their leaders Paul, Antony, and Pachomius.[194] If what they saw is true, their lives are as filled with marvels as those of our most sacred imams. They would sometimes spend ten years on end without seeing a single man, but they lived both day and night with demons. They were endlessly tormented by those evil spirits: they found them in their beds, they found them at table—there was no haven against them. If all this is true, O venerated brother, one must admit that no one lived in worse company.

Reasonable Christians regard all these stories as a very natural allegory that can help make us aware of the misery of the human lot.[195] In vain do we seek in the desert a peaceful state; temptations follow us always. Our passions, represented by the demons, still do not leave us. Those monsters of the heart, those illusions of the mind, those empty phantoms of error and deceit, appear before us always to seduce us and attack us even in our fastings

and our hair shirts—which is to say, in the very marrow of our strength.

As for me, O venerable brother, I know that the emissary of God has enchained Satan and hurled him into the abyss. He has purified the earth, formerly filled with the dominion of the evil one, and has made it worthy of the sojourn of angels and prophets.

From Paris, the 9th of the Moon of Shahban, 1715.

LETTER XCIV

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

I have never heard people discuss public law without beginning by searching carefully for the origin of societies —which strikes me as ridiculous.[196] If men never formed any societies, if they abandoned each other and fled each other's company, we should have to ask the reason for this and search out why they stand off from each other. But they are all mutually bound one to the other. A son is born in his father's proximity, and he stays there. There's your society and your reason for society.[197]

International law[198] is better known in Europe than in Asia. Nonetheless, it can be said that the passions of princes, the patience of peoples, and the fawning of writers have served to corrupt all its principles.

This law, such as it exists today, is a science that teaches princes just how far they can violate justice without jeopardizing their own interests. What an aim, Rhedi, to want to erect injustice into a system, to give the rules of the system, form its principles, and accordingly draw forth consequences—and all that in order to harden their consciences![199]

The unlimited power of our sublime sultans, which knows no other law than its own, produces no greater number of monsters than that unworthy art which hopes to bend to its will justice, rigidly inflexible though it may be.

One might say, Rhedi, that there exist two quite different justices; one that regulates individual affairs and that reigns in civil affairs; another that settles differences

between nation and nation and that tyrannizes over public law—as if public law were not itself a form of civil law, not, in truth, of a particular country, but of the world.

On all this, I shall explain my views further in another letter.

From Paris, the 1st of the
Moon of Zilhage, 1716.

LETTER XCV

Usbek to the same

Magistrates should administer justice between citizen and citizen. Each nation should administer justice between itself and another nation. In this second meting out of justice, no other principles can be used save those obtaining in the first.

Between nation and nation, a third party is rarely necessary as judge, for the terms of dispute are almost always clear and easy to conclude. The interests of the two nations are usually so different that one need only love justice to be able to find it. One can hardly be prejudiced for one's own cause.

This is not the case in conflicts arising between particular parties. Since they are living together in society, their interests are so mixed and confused, there are so many different kinds of interests, that a third party is necessary to disentangle what the selfish desires of the interested parties try to obscure.

There are only two kinds of just wars: those waged to repel an attacking enemy and those that result from coming to the assistance of an attacked ally.[200]

There would be no justification for waging war over the personal quarrels of a prince unless the offense were so serious that it justified the death of the prince of the nation that committed it. Thus a prince cannot wage war because an honor due to him has been refused, or because some questionable procedure has been used with his ambassadors, or by reason of similar complaints—no more so than an individual can kill another who refuses him priority. The reason for this is, since a declaration of war should be an act of justice in which the punishment

should always be in proportion to crime, one must always make sure that the person upon whom war is declared deserves to die, for to make war on someone is to want to punish him with death.

In international law, the most severe act of justice is war, for it can have as its effect the destruction of society.

Reparations constitute a second degree. Measuring the punishment by the crime is a law that courts have not been able to avoid carrying out.

A third act of justice is to deprive a prince of the advantages he can draw from us, ever mindful of measuring the punishment by the crime.

The fourth act of justice—which must be the most usual—is the renunciation of alliance with a people against whom justifiable complaints can be lodged. This punishment corresponds to the banishment that courts have established to isolate the guilty from a given society. Thus a prince from whose alliance we withdraw is isolated from our society and is no longer one of its constituent members.

No greater affront can be made to any prince than to refuse his alliance, and no greater honor can be paid him than to conclude such an alliance. Nothing among men can seem more glorious and even more useful to them than to see others constantly mindful of their preservation.

But if an alliance is to bind us, it must be a just one; thus a pact made between two nations in order to oppress a third is not legitimate and can be broken without committing a crime.

It is fitting neither to the honor nor the dignity of a prince to ally himself with a tyrant. It is said that an Egyptian monarch had the King of Samos apprised of his cruelty and tyranny and served notice on him to reform. Since the latter did nothing about it, he sent an emissary to say that he renounced his friendship and his alliance.[201]

Conquest in itself gives no rights. When the conquered nation still exists, it forms a pledge of peace and of reparation for the wrong; if the nation is destroyed or scattered, it constitutes a monument to tyranny.[202]

Peace treaties are so sacrosanct among men that they seem to be the voice of nature recovering her rights. They are legitimate when their conditions are such that both

peoples can be preserved. Short of this, the nation that is to perish, deprived of its natural defense by the peace treaty, can seek that natural defense through war.

For nature, which has established varying degrees of strength and weakness among men, has also often equated weakness to strength by way of despair.*

Here, my dear Rhedi, you have what I call public law. Here you have international law, or rather, the law of reason.

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Zilhage, 1716.

LETTER XCVI

The chief eunuch to Usbek in Paris

There have arrived here many yellow women from the kingdom of Visapur.[203] I purchased one of them for your brother, the Governor of Mazanderan,[204] who sent me his exalted order a month ago along with a hundred tomans.

I am all the better a judge of women since they never take me by surprise, and since with me the eyes are never troubled by movements of the heart.

Never have I seen such regular and perfect features: her sparkling eyes bring life to her face and enhance its complexion with a color capable of effacing all the charms of Circassia.

The chief eunuch of an Ispahan merchant was bargaining along with me, but she seemed to flee his eyes with disdain and to seek out my own as if she meant to tell me that a lowly merchant was unworthy of her and that she was destined for a more illustrious husband.

I must confess that I feel a secret joy within myself when I think of the charms of that lovely person. I seem to picture her entering your brother's harem; I take pleasure in anticipating the astonishment of all the women: the imperious pain of some, the mute affliction, still more painful, of the others; the malicious consolation of those who have lost hope, and the incensed ambition of those who still aspire.

From one end of the realm to the other, I am going to have the face of a whole seraglio changed. What passions

I shall arouse! What fears and miseries I am setting in motion!

Meanwhile, in the turmoil inside, the outside will be no less calm. Great revolutions will be hidden in the depths of hearts. Disappointments will be swallowed, joys contained. Obedience shall be no less complete and rules no less inflexible. Gentleness, ever restrained from appearing, will issue forth out of despair itself.

We note that the more women we have under our eyes, the less trouble they give us. A more stringent need to please, less opportunity to band together, more examples of submissive obedience—all of this forges chains for them. Some are ever attentive to the behavior of others; it would seem that they work hand in glove with us to make themselves more dependent. They perform a part* of our task for us and open our eyes for us when we close them. What am I saying? They endlessly arouse the master against their rivals, and yet they cannot see how close they are to those that are punished.

But all of that, magnificent lord, is nothing without the presence of the master. What can we do with this vain semblance of an authority that is never entirely communicated? We represent but weakly half of your own self; we can show them only a hateful severity. As for you, you temper fear with hope; you are more absolute when you caress than when you threaten.

Come back then, O magnificent lord, return to these surroundings, and bring with you all the marks of your sway. Come and soften despondent passions; come and remove all pretext for transgression; come and calm the murmur of love and make duty itself lovable; last and not least, come to relieve your faithful eunuchs of a burden that grows every day more weighty.

From the seraglio at Ispahan, the 8th
of the Moon of Zilhage, 1716.

LETTER XCVII

Usbek to Hassein, dervish of the mountain of Jaron[205]

O thou, wise dervish, whose inquiring mind sparkles with such great knowledge, hear what I am about to tell thee.

There exist here philosophers who, in truth, have not yet attained to the zenith of Oriental wisdom. They have not yet been transported in rapture to the luminous throne. They have neither heard the ineffable words that resound throughout the concerts of angels, nor felt the fearful manifestation of divine frenzy. Rather, left to themselves, deprived of holy miracles, they are following silently the paths of human reason.

Thou couldst not possibly believe how far this guide has taken them. They have untangled chaos and have explained, by simple mechanics, the order of divine architecture. The author of nature gave movement to matter; no more was necessary to produce this prodigious variety of effects which we see in the universe.

Let ordinary lawmakers propose to us laws for regulating human societies—laws as subject to change as the minds of those who proposed them and those who observe them. These other thinkers speak only of general laws, immutable, eternal, which are to be observed without exception, with an order, a regularity, and infinite immediacy in the immensity of space.

Now what, O holy man, dost thou think these laws are? Thou mayest perhaps imagine that entering here into the council of the Eternal, thou shalt be astonished by the sublimity of mysteries. Thou givest up any pretension to understand in advance; thou art prepared only to admire.

But thou must soon change thy thinking. These laws do not blind with false respect; their simplicity has kept them unknown for a long time, and it is only after much reflection that all the depth and extent of them has been comprehended.

The first law is that every body tends to move in a straight line unless it meets some obstacle that deflects it. The second, which is but a natural consequence, is that every body that revolves about a center point tends to withdraw from the center, for the farther away it is, the more the line it describes approaches a straight line.[206]

Therein, O sublime dervish, lies the key of nature; these are pregnant principles from which flow endless consequences.*

This knowledge of five or six truths has filled their philosophy with miracles and has caused them to achieve

almost as many* marvels and miracles as all we are told of concerning our own holy prophets.

For, in a word, I am convinced that not one of our learned doctors would have rested easy if he had been asked to weigh all the air surrounding the earth, or to measure all the water that falls annually on its surface; they would have had to think four times and over before saying how many leagues sound travels in an hour, or what is the time required by a ray of light to come from the sun to us, or how many fathoms there are from here to Saturn, or what is the angle of curvature on which a vessel should be hewn to make the best possible sailing ship.

If, perhaps, some divine man had ornamented the works of these philosophers with high-flown and lofty words, if he had mixed into them daring figures and mysterious allegories, he would have created a fine work, second only to our Holy Koran.

And yet, if I must tell thee how I really feel, I am scarcely drawn to a figured style. In our Koran* there are a great number of minor details that always seem so to me however much they be enhanced by the force and liveliness of expression. First of all, it seems to me that inspired books are only divine ideas couched in human terms. In our Koran, on the contrary, we often find the language of God and the ideas of man, as if by some admirable whimsey, God had dictated the words and man had furnished the ideas.[207]

Thou wilt say perhaps that I speak too freely of what is most sacred to us all. Thou wilt suppose that this is a fruit of the freedom in which people live in this country. No, heaven be praised! My mind has not corrupted my heart, and as long as I shall live, Ali will be my prophet.

From Paris, the 15th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1716.

LETTER XCVIII

Usbek to Ibben in Smyrna

There is no country in the world where fortune is as fickle as here. Every ten years occur revolutions that hurl

the rich into penury and raise the poor, on rapid wings, to the height of riches. One man is astonished by his poverty; the other, by his abundance. The newly rich admire the wisdom of providence; the poor admire the blind fatality of destiny.

Those who collect taxes swim amid treasures; there are few Tantaluses among them. They begin in this profession, however, in the lowest penury; while they are poor, they are treated like scum; when they are rich, they are quite esteemed—and so they leave no stone unturned to acquire esteem.[208]

At the present time they are in a terrible situation. A tribunal has just been established; it is known as the chamber of justice because it is about to take away all their wealth.[209] They can neither transfer nor hide their possessions, for they are required to declare them exactly, under pain of death. Thus they are forced to pass through a very strait gate: I mean between life and money. As an added piece of misfortune,* there is a minister,[210] known for his wit, who honors them with his witticisms and jests about all the decisions of the council. Not every day do you find ministers able and willing to make the people laugh; they should be grateful to him for having undertaken to do so.

The class of lackeys is more respectable in France than elsewhere; it constitutes a seminary for great lords, and it fills up the vacuum of other estates.[211] Those who make up this class take the place of the nobility fallen on hard times, of ruined magistrates, of gentlemen killed in the fury of war; when they cannot do so by themselves, they rebuild the strength of all the great houses by means of their daughters, who become a kind of manure to fertilize dry and hilly soils.

I find, Ibben, that providence is admirable in the way in which it distributes wealth. If it had granted wealth only to good men, you couldn't have made enough distinction between wealth and virtue and would no longer feel the sterility of wealth. But when one closely examines the sort of people who have most of it, by dint of despising the wealthy, one comes to have a scorn for wealth.

From Paris, the 26th of the
Moon of Maharram, 1717.

LETTER XCIX

Rica to Rhedi in Venice

I find the whimsey of fashion among the French astonishing.[212] They have already forgotten how they were dressed this summer; they don't know as yet how they'll be dressed this winter. But what you would above all find difficult to believe is how much it costs a husband to keep his wife in style.

What good would it do for me to give an exact description of their dress and their adornment? A new style would come along and destroy all my effort, as well as that of their workers, and before you had received my letter all would be changed.

A woman who leaves Paris to spend six months in the country comes back as antiquated as if she had moldered thirty years there. A son is unable to recognize the portrait of his mother, so strange do the clothes in which she is painted seem to him. He imagines some American lady is pictured, or else that the painter tried to represent one of his flights of fancy.[213]

Sometimes headdresses rise ever so little, while a revolution can make them drop all at once. There was a time when their great height put a woman's face at the midpoint of her body. In some other period her feet occupied the same place, the heels forming a pedestal to hold them suspended in the air. Who could believe the following? Architects have frequently been forced to lift or lower or widen doors according as women's attire required such a change; the rules of their art have been subjected to whims. Sometimes, on a given face, you will see a prodigious number of beauty spots; the next day they have all disappeared. In times past, women had waists and teeth;[214] today, they are out of the question. In this changeable nation, whatever the sorry jesters* may say, daughters are built far differently from their mothers.

The same goes for manners and customs as for styles. Frenchmen change their way of life according to the age of the king. The monarch could even manage to make a serious nation of them—if he undertook to do so. The prince impresses the character of his mind on the court;

the court, on the city; the city on the provinces. The sovereign's soul is a die that gives shape to all the others.

From Paris, the 8th of the Moon of Saphar, 1717.

LETTER C

Rica to the same

The other day I was talking to you about the amazing inconstancy of Frenchmen as to fashion. And yet it is inconceivable how adamant they can be. They trace everything back to it; fashion is the measuring stick with which they pass judgment on all that other nations do. What is unheard of to them always seems ludicrous. I confess I am unable to co-ordinate this frenzy for custom with the fickleness with which they change it every day.

When I say that they look down on everything foreign, I speak only of minor details, for on matters of importance, they seem to be unsure of themselves to the point of losing prestige. They will admit willingly that other peoples are wiser, provided one agrees that it is they who are better dressed. They are quite willing to submit to the laws of a rival nation, provided that French wigmakers have the legislative right to hand down decisions on foreign wigs. Nothing seems so fine to them as to observe the taste of their cooks reigning from the frozen north to the south, and the arrangements of their hairdressers carried off into all the boudoirs of Europe.[215]

With such noble advantages, what does it matter that common sense comes to them from elsewhere and that they have borrowed from their neighbors everything touching upon political and civil government?

Who could imagine that the oldest and most powerful kingdom of Europe should have been governed for more than ten centuries by laws not made by itself? If the French had been conquered, this would not be hard to understand. But they are the conquerors!

They have abandoned the ancient laws, made by their first kings in general assemblies of the nation, and what is even more amazing is that the Roman laws[216] they took in their place were in part made and in part written down by emperors contemporary with their own lawgivers.

And, so that their borrowing should be complete and their common sense all come from elsewhere, they have adopted all the constitutions of the Pope and have made them an additional part of their legal code—a new kind of servitude.

It is true that in recent times, several statutes of cities and provinces have been drawn up, but most of these are taken from Roman law.

This abundance of adopted—or so to speak, naturalized—laws is so great that it overwhelms both justice and judges. But even these volumes of law are as nothing next to that frightening army of glossarists, commentators, and compilers—men as weak in their exactitude of mind as they are strong in numbers.

Nor is that all. These foreign laws have introduced formalities to an excess* shaming human reason.[217] It would be difficult to decide whether formality grew more pernicious upon taking over jurisprudence or upon lodging itself in medicine, whether it has done more damage beneath the robe of a lawyer or under the large hat of a doctor, and whether it did not ruin more people in the one case than it killed in the other.

From Paris, the 12th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1717.

LETTER CI

Usbek to ——

People are always talking here about the Constitution.[218] The other day I went into a house where my eyes first fell on a corpulent man with a rosy complexion; he was saying in a loud voice: "I have given my mandate; I shall not reply to all you are saying. Just read this communication and you will see that I have resolved all your doubts.

"I put a lot of sweat in the writing of it," he said rubbing his hand over his forehead. "I needed to have all my doctrine at my finger tips, and I had to read plenty of Latin authors."

"I should think so," said a man who happened to be there, "for it is a fine work and I should readily dare that Jesuit who comes to see you so often to write a better one."

"Well, read it then," continued the first, "and you will be better informed on these matters in a half an hour than if I had spoken a whole day to you." That's the method he used to avoid getting into conversation and committing himself on his ability.

But as he saw he was being pressed, he was obliged to step out from under his cover and he started to say many theological stupidities, upheld all the while by a dervish who returned them to him with respect. When two men present denied some principle, he would say immediately: "That point is certain. We have so judged and we are infallible judges."

"And how does it come about," I then asked, "that you are infallible judges?"

"Can you not see," he replied, "that the Holy Ghost enlightens us."

"That is fortunate," I replied to him, "for from the way you have spoken everything you said today, I can see that you are in great need of enlightenment."

From Paris, the 18th of the
Moon of Rebiab I, 1717.

LETTER CII

Usbek to Ibben

The most powerful European states are those of the Emperor[219] and those of the kings of France, Spain, and England. Italy and a great part of Germany are divided into an infinite number of little states, whose princes, to speak the truth, are martyrs to sovereignty. Our glorious sultans have more women than some* of these princes have subjects. The princes of Italy, who are the least united, are the most to be pitied. Their states are as open as a caravansary into which the first to show up must be welcomed. Thus they must attach themselves to the great princes and share with them their fright rather than their friendship.

The majority of the governments in Europe are monarchies, or rather, called so, for I am not sure that there have ever been any true ones. At least, it is difficult* for them to have existed very long in a pure state.*[220] For

monarchy is a violent state, always degenerating into despotism, or into a republic. Power can never be equally divided between the people and the prince; the balance is too delicate to maintain. Power must always diminish on one side and grow on the other. However, the advantage is usually on the prince's side, for he is the head of the armed forces.

Thus the power of European kings is great, and it can be said that they have as much of it as they choose. But they do not exercise it with the same scope as our sultans: first, because they do not choose to upset the customs and religion of the people; secondly, because it is not to their interest to carry it so far.[221]

Nothing brings our princes closer to the condition of their subjects than this tremendous power they exercise over them; nothing subjects them more to the whims and reverses of fortune.

The habit they have of killing, at the slightest provocation, all who displease them upsets the proportion that should obtain between offenses and punishments and that is, as it were, the soul of states and the harmony of empires. Such proportion, scrupulously maintained by Christian princes, gives them a measureless advantage over our sultans.

A Persian who, from indiscretion or ill fortune, has drawn upon himself the disfavor of the prince, is sure to die.[222] His least shortcoming, his least whimsical sally, places him necessarily in that position. But if he had made an attempt on the sovereign's life, or if he had attempted to deliver his fortresses to the enemy, he would also end up by losing his life. Thus he runs no greater risk in the second case than in the first.

And so, seeing that for the least disfavor death is certain and realizing that nothing could be worse, he is naturally encouraged to unsettle the state and to conspire against the sovereign, for it is the only resource left to him.

Such is not the case with members of the nobility of Europe, where disfavor involves only the removal of good will and preferment. They retire from court and become intent only upon enjoying a quiet life and the benefits of their rank. Since they are made to perish only for the crime of lese majesty, they are fearful of being guilty of

that crime, considering what they have to lose and how little they have to gain; this explains why you see very few revolts and very few princes dying a violent death.

If our princes, in their unlimited power, were to employ not quite so much vigilance in safeguarding their lives, they would not last a single day. If they did not have in their pay a tremendous number of troops to bully the rest of their subjects, their empire could not stand a single month.

It was only four or five centuries ago that a king of France took measures, contrary to the common usage of the period, to protect himself against assassins sent by a minor Asian prince to bring about his death.[223] Until that time, kings had lived peacefully amid their subjects, like fathers in the midst of their children.[224]

The kings of France, far from being able, as are our sultans, to deprive one of their subjects of life of their own volition, on the contrary always carry along with their persons amnesty for all criminals. It is sufficient for a man to have been fortunate enough to lay eyes on the august face of his prince to become worthy of life again. These monarchs are like the sun, which brings with it everywhere warmth and life.[225]

From Paris, the 8th of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1717.

LETTER CIII

Usbek to the same

To continue with the idea of my last letter, here is approximately what a rather sensible European was saying to me the other day:

"The worst solution Asian princes could have found is to remain in hiding as they do. They try to make themselves more respected thereby, but they make the idea of royalty respected and not the king, and they encourage the attachment of their subjects to a given throne and not to a given person.

"The invisible ruling power is always the same for the people. Although ten kings whose names they do not know may have cut each other's throats one after the

other, the people feel no change. It is as if they had been governed in succession by ghosts.

"If the hated parricidal assassin of our great King Henry IV had attacked instead a king of the Indies, master of the royal seal and of an immense treasury that would have seemed to the assassin to have been amassed especially for himself, he would have calmly taken over the reins of empire without a single man's having thought of appealing to his king, his family, or his children.

"People are astonished that there is almost never any change in the government of Oriental princes. How does that come about if not from the fact that it is tyrannical and frightful?

"Changes can be made only by the prince or by the people. But, in this matter, princes are very careful not to make any, for with such a high degree of power, they already have all they can have. If they were to change anything, it could only be to their own disadvantage.

"As for the subjects, if one of them were to formulate some resolution, he would not possibly think of carrying it out against the framework of the state. For, in a sudden move, he would need to counterbalance a fearsome and ever undivided power. Time as well as the means are lacking to him. But he needs only to go directly to the sole source of that power; he needs only a second of time and an arm to strike.

"The assassin ascends the throne and the monarch descends, falls, and expires at his feet.

"A malcontent in Europe thinks in terms of maintaining some secret spy service, of going over to the enemy, of seizing some fortified town, of arousing foolish muttering among the subjects. In Asia, he goes straight to the prince, takes him by surprise, strikes, and overthrows. He removes even the very idea of him. In one flash, the slave is master; in one flash, the usurper is legitimate.

"Unhappy the king with but one head! He gives the appearance of bringing together all his power on that head only the better to show the first ambitious man the place where he will find all that power gathered." [226]

From Paris, the 17th of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1717.

LETTER CIV

Usbek to the same

The peoples of Europe are not all uniformly subjected to their princes. For example, the impatient temperament of the English allows their king scarcely any time to consolidate his authority. Submission and obedience are two virtues they make least of. On this score, they say extraordinary things. According to them, there is only one bond that can produce attachment in men: gratitude. A husband, a wife, a father, and a son are bound mutually only by the love they have one for the other, or by the benefits they make possible one for the other. These various motives of gratitude are the origin of all kingdoms and all societies.[227]

But if a prince, rather than seeking to have his subjects live happily, tries to oppress and destroy them, the principle of obedience ceases to operate: nothing binds them, nothing attaches them to him, and they return to their natural freedom. They hold that, since it could never have had a legitimate origin, any power without limitation could not be legitimate. For, they say, we could not grant to someone else greater power over us than we have ourselves. Now we do not possess unlimited power over ourselves; for example, we cannot take our lives. Nobody on earth therefore, they conclude, has such power.[228]

The crime of lese majesty, according to them, is nothing more than a crime committed by a weaker against a stronger by disobeying him, whatever the manner of disobedience. Thus the English people who discovered themselves the stronger against one of their kings, declared that it was a crime of lese majesty for a prince to make war on his subjects.[229] They are certainly quite right, therefore, when they say that the precept of their own Koran, commanding them to submit to Powers,[230] is not difficult to observe, for it is impossible for them not to follow it—all the more so as it is not to the most virtuous they are constrained to submit but to the strongest.

The English recall that one of their kings, having conquered and imprisoned another prince who lay claim to his crown, was desirous of reproaching the latter for his per-

fidy and lack of fidelity. "It was only a moment ago," replied the unfortunate prince, "that it was decided which one, of the two of us, is the traitor." [231]

A usurper calls rebels all those who have not oppressed the country as he has, and believing there can be no laws where he can see no judges, he causes the caprices of chance and fortune to be revered as if they were judgments of heaven.

From Paris, the 20th of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1717.

LETTER CV

Rhedi to Usbek in Paris

You have spoken much, in one of your letters, about the arts and sciences cultivated in the West. You will consider me a barbarian, but I am not so sure that the profit drawn from them can make reparation to men for the bad use made of them daily.

I have heard it said that the invention of mortar shells in itself deprived all the peoples of Europe of their freedom. Princes, no longer able to entrust the protection of fortified cities to burghers, who would have surrendered at the first shelling, have therefore had an excuse for maintaining great bodies of regular troops, with which, subsequently, they have oppressed their subjects.

You know that since the invention of gunpowder, there is no impregnable city, which is to say, Usbek, that there is no asylum on earth against violence and injustice.

I am ever trembling lest someone should fall upon some secret that makes possible a shortened path to the destruction of men, peoples, and entire nations.

You have read the historians. Pay them close heed. Almost every monarchy was founded upon ignorance of the arts and was destroyed only because it was overcultivated. The ancient Persian empire can furnish us with a local example.

I have not been in Europe long, but I have heard sensible people talking about the ravages of chemistry. It would seem to be a fourth scourge to ruin men and destroy them one by one, but in a continual fashion, whereas war, pestilence, and famine destroy them in mass, but only periodically.

What good has the invention of the compass and the discovery of so many other peoples done us except to communicate to us their diseases rather than their wealth? By general agreement, gold and silver were established as the price of all merchandise and as a gage of value because these metals were rare, and invalid for any other use. What should it then matter that they became more common and that, to designate the value of a commodity, we had two or three tokens instead of one? It only made things more inconvenient.[232]

But, from another point of view, this invention has been ruinous for the countries that have been discovered. Entire nations have been destroyed, and men who have escaped death have been reduced to such crude servitude that the story of it makes Moslems shiver.

Happy ignorance of Mohammed's children! Lovable simplicity, so cherished by our Holy Prophet, you recall to me always the innocence of olden times and the peace that ruled in the hearts of our forefathers.

From Venice, the 2nd* of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1717.

LETTER CVI

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Either you are not thinking about what you say, or your actions are better than your thinking. You left your country for an education, and yet you scorn all instruction. To educate yourself, you have come to a country where the arts are cultivated, and yet you consider them harmful. Shall I say what I think, Rhedi? I am more in agreement with you than you are with yourself.

Have you ever reflected upon the unhappy and savage condition into which the loss of the arts would drag us? You don't need to imagine it; you can see it. There still exist on earth peoples among whom a passably instructed monkey could live in honor. He would find that he was about on the same level with the other inhabitants. Nobody would find that he had an unusual mind or a strange character. He would be accepted like anyone else, and would even stand out by his gentleness.

You write that founders of empires have almost all been ignorant of the arts. I cannot deny that barbarous peoples have been able to spread over the earth like impetuous torrents and to cover the best-organized kingdoms with their armies. But note attentively that from the conquered nations they have learned the arts and how to use them. Without that their power would have passed like the noise of thunder and storm.

You fear, you say, that some crueler method of destruction than that now used will be invented. No. If a fatal invention were to be made, it would soon be outlawed by international law, and unanimous agreement among nations would bury the discovery. Princes have no interest in conquering by such means. They have to be* on the lookout for additional subjects, not territory.

You commiserate on the invention of gunpowder and shells, and you find it strange that there should no longer be an impregnable fortress—that is to say, you find it strange that wars should be ended sooner today than they used to be before.

You must have noticed in your readings in history, that since the invention of gunpowder, battles are much less bloody than they were before, because there is practically no direct engagement now.

And even if some particular case where one of the arts was harmful were to be found, should it for that reason be abandoned? Do you believe, Rhedi, that religion, which our Holy Prophet brought down from heaven, is harmful because it will one day serve to confound the perfidious Christians?

You think that arts soften a people and are thereby the cause for the fall of empires. You speak of the destruction of the empire of the ancient Persians as the effect of their softness. But that example is far from decisive, since the Greeks who conquered and subjugated them so many times, cultivated the arts with infinitely more care than they.

When people say that the arts make men effeminate, they are not in any case talking of the people who practice them, for these people are never idle, and of all vices, idleness is the one that most softens courage.

The whole question reduces to those who appreciate the arts. But in every organized society, those who enjoy

the commodities of one art are obliged to cultivate another unless they want to be brought to shameful poverty, and therefore, it follows that softness and idleness are incompatible with the arts.

Paris is perhaps the most sensual city in the world, the city where pleasures are most highly refined. Yet it is the city where people lead the hardest life. So that one man can live in delight, a hundred others must labor ceaselessly. A woman has taken it into her head that she must appear at a gathering in a certain attire. From that moment on, fifty workers get no more sleep and are without time to drink and eat. She orders and is obeyed more promptly than our monarch would be, because personal profit is the greatest monarch on earth.

This ardor for work, this passion for growing rich, passes along from social class to social class, from the artisans right up to the nobles. No one likes to be poorer than the one he has just noticed directly below him. You will see in Paris a man who has the wherewithal to live until Judgment Day, and yet he works ceaselessly and risks shortening his life in piling up, as he puts it, the necessities of life.

The same spirit is caught by the nation. Work and industry are everywhere. Where then is this effeminate people you talk so much of?

I shall suppose, Rhedi, that a kingdom sanctions only those arts—already quite a few—that are absolutely necessary to the tilling of the soil, and that it banishes all those that serve only delight and fancy. I maintain that this state will be one of the most miserable* ever to exist in the world.

If the inhabitants were courageous enough to give up so many things they need, that people would grow weaker each day and the state would become so enfeebled that no power would be too small to conquer it.

It would be easy for me to go into great detail and to demonstrate to you that the incomes of individuals, and consequently, that of the prince, would cease almost completely. There would be almost no more balance of professional skill between citizens. You would * see the end of that circulation of wealth and progression of income proper to the interdependence of the arts. Each individual would live from his land and would derive from it just

exactly what he needed to keep from dying of hunger. But since this is often not even a twentieth of the state income, the number of inhabitants would have to diminish proportionately until there remained only a twentieth* part of them.

Study carefully where the income from industry goes. A fund of capital produces each year for its owner only the twentieth* part of its value. Yet from a pistole's worth of color, a painter will paint a canvas worth fifty. The same can be said for goldsmiths, woolworkers, silkworkers, and all other kinds of artisans.

From all this, you must conclude, Rhedi, that to keep a prince powerful, his subjects must live in pleasure. He must work to secure all manner of superfluity for them, devoting to this as much attention as he turns to the necessities of life.[233]

From Paris, the 14th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1717.

LETTER CVII

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

I have seen the young monarch. His life is very precious to all his subjects. It is not less so to all of Europe by reason of the great confusion his death could bring.[234] But kings are like Gods, and while they are alive, they must be thought immortal. His features are majestic but charming; a fine upbringing seems to conspire with a fortunate native disposition and already promises a great prince.

It is said that the characters of Western kings cannot be known until they have passed through the two great tests of mistress and religious adviser. Soon you'll see both of these striving to get control over this king's mind, and there will be many battles as a consequence, for under a young prince, these two forces are always rivals, while under an old prince, they become reconciled and work together.[235] Under a young prince, the dervish has a very difficult role to sustain. The king's strength is the latter's weakness; the rival force triumphs over both weakness and strength.

When I came to France I found the late king governed absolutely by women, and yet, at his age, I believe he, of all the monarchs in the whole world, was the one who needed them least. One day I heard a woman saying: "Something must be done for that young colonel; I am not unaware of his qualities. I'll speak to the Minister about it."

Another woman said: "It is surprising that this young abbé should be overlooked. He must be raised to bishop. He is a man of good family, and I can vouch for his morals."

You must, however, not imagine that these women talking were favorites of the Prince. In all probability, they had not spoken to him twice in their whole lives—although this is an easy thing to do with European princes. It's just that there is nobody with some post at court in Paris, or in the provinces, who hasn't some woman through whose hands he dispenses all the favors and sometimes all the injustices of which he is capable. These women are all in communication one with the other and constitute a sort of republic whose ever-active members mutually assist and aid one another. It's like a new state within the state, and if the man who is at court in Paris, or in the provinces, observing the actions of ministers, magistrates, and prelates, does not know the women who control them, he is like a fellow who can clearly see a machine working but doesn't know where the springs are.

Do you think, Ibben, that a woman decides to be a minister's mistress in order to sleep with him? What an idea! It's so that she can present him each morning with five or six requests. The natural goodness of these women is manifest in the haste with which they do favors for a legion of unhappy people—who in turn round up for them a hundred thousand livres of annual settlement.

In Persia, people complain that the kingdom is ruled by two or three women. It is much worse in France, where women in general rule, and take not only all authority wholesale but even share it among themselves in retail.

From Paris, the last of the
Moon of Shalval, 1717.

LETTER CVIII

Usbek to ——

There is a kind of book which is completely unknown to us in Persia, and which strikes me as being very fashionable here. This is the literary periodical. Laziness feels virtuous when reading them; people are delighted to be able to run through thirty volumes in a quarter of an hour.

In most books, the author has barely finished the usual dedication, and already his readers are lost. He introduces them, half-dead, to material drowned beneath a sea of words. One fellow would like to find immortality in a duodecimo; another in a quarto; a third, with more noble pretensions, in a folio. Thus the author must stretch out his material accordingly—which he does, mercilessly, never considering the difficulty of the poor reader, who kills himself trying to reduce what the author took such trouble to amplify.

I cannot see, ——, what possible value there is in writing such works; I would write just as many as others if I were intent upon ruining my health and my bookseller.

The great fault of these journalists is to talk only of new books, as if truth were always something new. It seems to me that a man has no good reason to prefer new books until he has read all the old ones.

But when they impose upon themselves the rule of talking only about works still hot from the forge, they impose another rule, which is to be very boring. They are not about to criticize the books from which they extract passages, whatever reason they may have for doing so. For, seriously, what man would want to make ten or twelve enemies every month?

The majority of authors are like poets who would put up with a shower of bastinadoes without complaining, but who, if not solicitous for their shoulders, are so much so for their works that they could not possibly withstand the least criticism. One must therefore be very careful not to attack them in such a sensitive spot; these reviewers for periodicals are well aware of that. Thus they do the exact opposite. They start out by praising the subject

treated—first proof of insipidity. From there, they pass on to praises of the author, forced praises, for they are dealing with people still able to draw breath, people all ready, poised, to have the last word and to thunderstrike with claps of a pen any foolhardy journalist.

From Paris, the 5th of the Moon of Zilcade, 1718.

LETTER CIX

Rica to ——

The University of Paris is the eldest daughter of the kings of France—and very much the eldest, for she is more than nine hundred years old.[236] And so, sometimes, she daydreams.

I was told that some time ago she had a great set-to with several doctors over the letter *Q*, which she wanted pronounced like a *K*.[237] The dispute got so warm that some people had their wealth confiscated. The *Parlement* had to end the argument, and in a solemn decision, it granted permission to all subjects of the French king to pronounce the said letter as they saw fit. What a fine sight to behold the two most respected bodies of Europe busied with deciding the fate of a letter of the alphabet!

My dear ——, it would appear that the heads of the greatest men shrink when they meet together, and that where there are the wisest men, there, there is the least wisdom. Great bodies are always so interested in minutiae, in empty procedures* that they never get to the crux of the matter until afterward. I have heard it said that a king of Aragon, having called together the states of Aragon and Catalonia, beheld the first sessions used up in deciding in which language the deliberations would be conducted. The dispute was lively, and the two states would have broken off talks a thousand times if an expedient had not been concocted, which was that the question would be put in Catalan, and the answer in Aragonese.[238]

From Paris, the 25th of the Moon of Zilhage, 1718.

LETTER CX

Rica to ——

The role of a pretty woman is much more serious than commonly thought. Nothing can be more serious than what happens during her morning toilette, amidst her servants. An army general is not more attentive to the disposition of his right wing, or of his reserve, than she is to positioning a beauty spot that could go amiss but that she hopes and anticipates will be successful.

What unrest of mind, what care, to conciliate without letup the interests of two rival suitors, to appear neutral to both, whereas she has given herself to both, and to act as mediator on all the scores of complaint she gives them!

What energy expended in arranging successful pleasure jaunts and seeing that they are continually revived, while forestalling all the accidents that might break them up!

Yet with all that, the greatest difficulty is not so much having a good time as pretending to: bore women as much as you like, they will forgive you as long as you can make them believe they have had a good time.

A few days ago, I was invited to a supper given by some ladies in the country. On the way there, they kept saying over and over again: "At least, we must be sure to have a good time."

We happened to be rather badly chosen for congeniality, and so we were rather sober. "You must admit," said one of the ladies, "that we are having a very good time. There couldn't be in all Paris a gayer party than ours today."

As boredom kept slipping over me, a lady shook me and said: "Well, now, aren't we the gay ones?"

"Yes," I replied as I yawned, "I think I shall die from laughing." Meanwhile, sadness kept winning out over our considerations, and as for me, I felt myself dragged from yawn to yawn into a lethargic slumber that put an end to all my pleasures.

From Paris, the 11th of the
Moon of Maharram, 1718.

LETTER CXI*

Usbek to ——*

The reign of the late king was so long that its end had made people forget the beginning. Today, it has become the thing to do to concern oneself only with the events of his minority, and so nothing is read any more except memoirs of that time.[239]

Here is the speech that one of the generals of the city of Paris delivered in a counsel of war; I must admit that I don't understand very much of it.

"Gentlemen, although our troops have been driven back with losses, I believe it will be easy for us to overcome this setback.* I have six couplets of a song all ready to publish; this, I am persuaded, will set everything back into balance. I have chosen several very good voices that, issuing from certain very hearty breasts, will stir up the people* miraculously. The words are written on an air that up to now, has always had a very special effect.

"If that is not enough, we shall * issue an engraving showing Mazarin hanged.*

"Happily for us, he does not speak very good French; he murders it so badly that it is impossible for his fortunes to do anything but decline. We miss no chance to point out to the people his ridiculous pronunciation.[240] * The other day, we found a grammatical error so obvious that it was burlesqued on every street corner.

"I trust that before another week goes by, the people will make of* the name of Mazarin a generic term for all beasts of burden and drayage.

"Since our defeat,* our tunes have so furiously vexed him on the score of his original sin that in order not to see the number of his supporters cut in half, he has been obliged to dismiss all his pages.

"Therefore, cheer up, take courage, and rest assured that we shall make him cross back over the mountains to the sound of our catcalls." *

From Paris, the 4th of the Moon of Shahban,* 1718.

LETTER CXII

Rhedi to Usbek in Paris

During my stay in Europe, I have been reading the ancient and modern historians. I am continually making comparisons. I take pleasure in seeing them pass in review before me, so to speak, and I fix my attention in particular on those great changes that have made some ages so different from others, and the earth so unlike itself.

Perhaps you have never given thought to something that surprises me daily. How can the world be so sparsely populated in comparison with what it once was? [241] How can nature have lost that prodigious fertility of primitive times? Could she be already in her old age, and will she fall into her dotage?

I stayed in Italy over a year, and I saw only the ruins of that ancient Italy which was so famous in times past. Although everybody lives in cities, they are completely deserted and depopulated; it seems they go on existing only to mark the spot where those cities so talked of by history once existed.

There are people who claim that the city of Rome alone, once contained more people than a great* European kingdom nowadays. There were certain Roman citizens who had ten and even twenty thousand slaves, not counting those who worked on the country estates, and when you consider that there were four to five hundred thousand citizens, you can't arrive at a total number of inhabitants without straining the imagination to the point of rebellion.

Once there were powerful kingdoms and numerous populations in Sicily; all have since disappeared. That island now has nothing of greater import than its volcanoes.

Greece is so deserted that it contains not even the hundredth part of its ancient inhabitants.

Spain, formerly so populous, has only its depopulated countryside to show today, and France is nothing in comparison with that ancient Gaul spoken of by Caesar.

The northern countries are very seriously stripped and are far from the point of being obliged, as formerly, to divide and to send out swarms of entire colonies and nations in search of new homes.

Poland and European Turkey are almost without population.

You couldn't possibly find in America the fiftieth* part of the men who once formed such great empires.

Asia is in scarcely any better shape. Asia Minor, which used to contain so many powerful monarchies and such a great number of large cities, now has only two or three. As for mainland Asia, what is under Turkish rule is no better populated. It could be shown that if the condition of that part which is under the domination of our kings were compared to the flourishing condition of times past, it would contain only a very small part of the inhabitants who were legion at the time of Xerxes and the Dariuses.[242]

As to the small states surrounding these great empires, they are truly deserted: such are the kingdoms of Imeretia, Circassia, and Guriel. Their princes, with their vast holdings, can count scarcely fifty thousand inhabitants.

Egypt has fallen off no less badly than the other countries.

In fine, I survey the whole earth, and I find only remains. I have an idea that I can trace it to the ravages of pestilence and famine.

Africa has always been so unknown that it can't be talked about with the same precision as other parts of the world. But if attention is drawn only to its Mediterranean shores, known from time immemorial, you can see that it has declined seriously from what it was under the Carthaginians and the Romans. Today its princes are so weak that they constitute the tiniest powers in the world.

After a calculation as exact as can be made in this sort of question, I have discovered that there are on earth scarcely a tenth* of the men who were here in ancient times.* [243] What is astonishing is that it is decreasing daily in population, and if this continues, in ten years it will be nothing but desert.

That, my dear Usbek, is the most terrible catastrophe that has ever happened to the world. But people have scarcely noticed it because it came about imperceptibly and during the course of a great many centuries. This betokens an interior vice, a secret, hidden poison, a lingering illness afflicting human nature.

From Venice, the 10th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1718.

LETTER CXIII

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

The world, my dear Rhedi, is not incorruptible. The heavens themselves are not so. Astrologers are eyewitnesses to their shifting, a quite natural effect of the universal movement of matter.

The earth is subjected just as are other planets, to laws of movement. Within herself she suffers a perpetual struggle between her principles: sea and continent appear to be at war eternally. Every second produces new combinations.

Men, living in a home so subject to change, are themselves in just as unstable a state. A hundred thousand causes can be at work, capable of destroying them, or even more likely, of diminishing or increasing their numbers.

I shall not discuss those particular catastrophes, so often used by historians, that have destroyed whole cities and kingdoms. There have been general catastrophes that have many times brought the human race within an ace of its destruction.

History is full of those universal pestilences that time after time have afflicted the earth. It speaks of one, among others, that was so violent that it burned the very roots of plants and was felt in all the known world, even as far away as the empire of Cathay.[244] One more degree of corruption would have perhaps, in a single day, destroyed the whole of human nature.

Not quite two centuries ago, the most opprobrius of all maladies made itself felt in Europe, Asia, and Africa.[245] In short order, it had unbelievable effects. Men would have been finished if it had continued with the same fury. Overwhelmed by the ills of their birth, incapable of upholding the burden of society, they would have perished miserably.

What might have happened if the poison had been a little stronger? And it would doubtless have become so if men had not been fortunate enough to find a remedy as powerful as the one they discovered. Perhaps this disease, attacking the members of generation, would have attacked the very principle of generation.

But of what avail to talk of the destruction that might have come over the human race? Did it not actually happen, and did not the flood reduce the human race to a single family?

There are some philosophers who* distinguish between two creations: the creation of things and the creation of man. They are unable to comprehend [246] that matter and created objects are only six thousand years old and that God should have postponed his works for an eternity and called upon his creative powers only yesterday. Would this be because he was not able or because he didn't want to? But if he were not able at some point in time, then he would be unable at some other time. Thus, it must be because he did not choose to do it. However, since there can be no succession of change in God, if you admit that he might have chosen to do something at one time, then he always chose to, and from the very beginning.[247]

Nonetheless,* all historians talk of a primeval father. They present us with a picture of nascent human nature. Is it not natural to think* that Adam was saved from a universal disaster just as Noah was saved from the Flood, and that such great events have been frequent on earth since the creation of the world?

But all destruction is not violent; we can see several parts of the earth growing tired of furnishing subsistence to men. How do we know that the whole earth is not endowed with general causes of lassitude, slow and imperceptible though they may be.*

I have felt free to give you these general ideas before replying more in particular to your letter about the decrease of world population for the last seventeen or eighteen centuries. I shall demonstrate in a following letter that quite apart from any physical causes, there are moral causes that have produced that effect.

From Paris, the 8th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1718.

LETTER CXIV

Usbek to the same

You search for a reason why the earth is less populated than it formerly was, and if you are attentive you will see

that the great difference comes from the change that has come about in morals.

Since the Christian and Moslem religions have divided the Roman world between them, things have changed radically. These two religions are far from being as favorable to the propagation of the species as was the religion of those masters of the universe.

In their religion, polygamy was forbidden, and therein this religion had a great advantage over the Moslem religion. Divorce was permitted, which gave it no less considerable advantage over the Christian religion.

I can find nothing more contradictory than the plurality of women permitted by the Holy Koran and the order given to keep them satisfied contained in the same book. "See to your women," says the Prophet, "for you are as necessary to them as their clothing, and they are as necessary to you as your clothing." [248] This is a precept that makes the life of a true Moslem very toilsome. The man who has the four wives established by law, and only that many concubines and slaves—must he not be weighed down under so much clothing?

"Your women are a tilth for you," continues the Prophet. "Draw nigh, therefore, to your tilths; work their welfare for your souls, and one day you will find Him." [249]

I look upon a good Moslem as upon an athlete who is destined to wrestle without repose, but who, soon wearied and overcome by his first toils, languishes away in the very field of his victory and is buried, so to say, beneath his own triumphs.

Nature always works slowly, and so to speak, economically; her operations are never violent. Even in her production, she desires temperance. She proceeds only with rule and measure, and if she is hurried along, she soon falls into apathy; she uses all her remaining strength just to preserve herself while losing absolutely her productive force and her generative power.

It is into this state of exhaustion that we are put by that great number of women, much more likely to wear us out than to satisfy us. It is quite common among us to see a man in a huge seraglio with only a very small number of children. Most of the time, even the children are weak and unhealthy and partake of the apathy of their father.

Nor is that all. Such women, constrained to an artificial continence, need people to watch over them, and these people can only be eunuchs. Religion, jealousy, and reason itself allow no others to draw close. These guards need to be supplied in great numbers both to maintain peace inside, amid the ceaseless wars made by these women among themselves, and to prevent undertakings from the outside. Thus a man with ten wives or concubines has not too many with an equal number of eunuchs to guard them.[250] But what a great loss for society is constituted by these men, dead from birth. What loss in population must follow therefrom!

Slave girls who are in the seraglio, as are the eunuchs, to serve this great number of women, grow old there almost always in sad virginity. They cannot marry while they are there, and their mistresses, once they grow used to them, never get rid of them.

And that is how one single man employs in his pleasures so many subjects of both sexes, causes them to die to the state, and makes them useless for the propagation of the species.[251]

Constantinople and Ispahan are the capitals of the two greatest empires in the world. It is here that everything must eventually end; it is here that people, attracted in a thousand different ways, come from all quarters of the world. And yet these two cities are perishing from inside, and they would soon be destroyed if their sovereigns did not, almost every century, cause whole peoples to be brought in to repopulate them. I shall exhaust this subject in another letter.

From Paris, the 13th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1718.

LETTER CXV

Usbek to the same

The Romans possessed no fewer slaves than did we. They even had more, but they made better use of them.

Far from forcefully preventing the multiplication of these slaves, they encouraged it with all their power. They

associated them as often as possible in a sort of marriage. In this way they filled their houses with servants of both sexes and all ages, and filled the state with countless people.

These children of slaves, who eventually were a source of riches to the master, came into the world, uncounted, all about him. He alone was responsible for their nourishment and upbringing. The fathers, freed of such a burden, followed only the inclination of nature and multiplied with no fear of having too large a family.

I have mentioned to you that with us, all the slaves are kept busy guarding our women, and nothing more, and that in the eyes of the state they live in an eternal lethargy, with the result that the cultivation of arts and soil must be limited to a few freemen, a few heads of family, who moreover, devote to it as little time as possible.

Things were not the same with the Romans; the republic derived a measureless benefit from the use of this slave population. Each slave had his savings, which were his own on conditions laid down by the master. With this nest egg he worked, and gravitated in the direction toward which his ingenuity carried him. One would turn to investment and banking;* another to marine trade; one might sell retail; another might devote himself to some mechanical art, or else rent and exploit farming land. But there was not one who did not do everything he could to invest his nest egg, which procured for him, at once, comfort in his present servitude and hope in a future freedom. This procedure created a hard-working population, and encouraged industry and the arts.

These slaves, having become rich by their own work and diligence, freed themselves and became citizens. The republic continually repaired itself and received new families into its bosom as the old ones were destroyed.

Perhaps in some future letter I shall have occasion to prove to you that the more men there are in a state, the more commerce flourishes. I shall prove just as easily that the more commerce flourishes, the more the population increases. These two things help and encourage each other mutually, of necessity.

If such is the case, think how much that great number of slaves, ever hard-working, was to increase and grow!

Industry and abundance gave them birth, and they in turn gave birth to abundance and industry.

From Paris, the 16th of the Moon of Shahban, 1718.

LETTER CXVI

Usbek to the same

Up until now we have spoken of Moslem countries and have sought the reason why they were less populated than those subjected to the domination of the Romans. Let us now examine what produced the same effect with the Christians.

Divorce was permitted in the pagan religion, and forbidden among the Christians. This change, which at first seemed of such little importance, imperceptibly led to consequences so terrible that it is difficult to believe them.

Thus not only was its sweetness taken away from marriage, but its very end as an institution was threatened. By wanting to tighten its bonds, they loosened them, and instead of bringing hearts closer together as they claimed, they separated them forever.

Into such a free action, where the heart should play so important a role, restraint, necessity, and the very fatality of destiny were introduced. Repulsion, whim, and the antisociability of temperament were counted for nothing. They tried to stabilize the heart—which is to say, the thing in human nature that is the most variable and inconstant. People, burdened one with the other and almost always badly matched, were tied together irretrievably and without hope. They acted after the manner of those despots who had live men tied to dead bodies.

Nothing ever contributed more to mutual attachment than the possibility of divorce: husband and wife were encouraged to live patiently with their domestic difficulties, knowing that it was within their power to end them; often they held this power in their hands their whole lives through without using it, for the simple reason that they were always free to do so.

Such is not the case with Christians, who are driven

to despair for the future by present difficulties. They can see in the hardships of marriage, only their long duration, and so to speak, the eternity of them. Whence arise repulsion, discord, and contempt—so many losses for the cause of posterity. After scarcely three years of marriage, the essential function is neglected. Thereafter the couple passes together thirty years of indifference. Interior separations are formed which are as strong and perhaps even more dangerous than if they were exterior and public. Each partner lives and keeps to himself, and all at the expense of future races of men. Soon a man who is repelled by an eternal wife will turn to prostitutes—a shameful usage, so contrary to the welfare of society, which without fulfilling the object of marriage, represents at best only its pleasures.

If of two persons thus joined, one is unsuited to nature's design and the propagation of the species, whether by physical constitution or by age, then this member of the couple buries the other along with himself, and makes the other just as useless as himself.

Thus it should not be surprising to see that so many marriages among Christians furnish so few citizens. Divorce is abolished; badly matched marriages are not patched up; women no longer pass along successively, as they did with the Romans, through the hands of several husbands, who along the way, draw from them the best advantage possible.

I dare to say it clearly: if, in a republic like Sparta, where the citizens were forever chafing under strange and subtle decrees and where there was only one family—the republic—if in this republic it had been established that husbands should change wives every year, a countless population would have arisen.

It is rather difficult to make clear why the Christians were brought to abolishing divorce. Marriage, in every nation of the world, is a contract susceptible to all the conventions; none of them should have been banished save those that might have weakened its aim. But Christians do not look at it in this light. And thus they find it difficult to say exactly what it is. They do not see it as consisting in sensual pleasure; on the contrary, as I have said, they seem to want to banish that aspect insofar as

they can. It is for them rather an image, a representation, something mysterious that I don't understand at all.

From Paris, the 19th of the Moon of Shahban, 1718.

LETTER CXVII

Usbek to the same

The prohibition of divorce is not the sole cause of depopulation in Christian countries. The great number of eunuchs they keep is a no less considerable cause.

I am talking of the priests and dervishes, of both sexes, who vow themselves to eternal continence. With Christians, this is the virtue par excellence. And in this I cannot follow their reasoning, for I don't know what kind of a virtue is a virtue from which there results nothing.[252]

I find that their learned doctors clearly contradict themselves when they say that marriage is sacred and that celibacy, which is the absolute opposite, is even more so.[253] And this without mentioning that in the matter of precepts and fundamental dogmas the good is always the best.

The number of people professing celibacy is prodigious. In times past, fathers used to sentence their children to it from the cradle. Nowadays, they take vows themselves as early as the age of fourteen,[254] which amounts to about the same thing.

This art or trade of continence has destroyed more men than pestilence and the bloodiest of wars. In every religious house there can be seen an eternal family in which nobody is born and which maintains itself at the expense of all the other families. These houses are always agape, like so many abysses where future races of men are buried.[255]

This policy is quite different from that of the Romans, who established penal laws against those who refused to marry and chose to enjoy a freedom so contrary to the public utility.[256]

I am speaking now only of Catholic countries. In the Protestant religion, everyone has the right to make chil-

dren. This religion permits neither priests nor dervishes. If in its establishment, its founders, who brought everything back to primitive values, had not continually been accused of intemperance,[257] there can be no doubt that, having made marriage a universal practice, they would have gone on to lighten the yoke still further and would thus have managed to remove the barrier that separates Nazarene and Moslem on this score.

However that may be, it is certain that religion gives Protestants an infinite advantage over Catholics.

I shall dare to put it thus: in the present state of Europe, it is impossible for the Catholic religion to last another five hundred years.

Prior to the humbling of Spanish power, the Catholics were much stronger than the Protestants. The latter have bit by bit managed to come to a position of equality.* Protestants will continue to become richer and more powerful, and Catholics, weaker.

Protestant countries should be, and in reality, are more populous than Catholic countries. From which it follows, first, that taxes are more considerable since they increase along with the number of those who pay, and second, that the soil is better cultivated, and finally, that commerce flourishes to a greater extent because there are more people to make a fortune and because with more needs there are more resources for fulfilling them. When the number of people is only sufficient to till the soil, commerce must perish; and when the number is only enough to maintain commerce, the cultivation of the soil lags. That is to say, both decline at the same time, for you cannot concentrate on one except at the expense of the other.

As for Catholic countries, not only is cultivation of crops abandoned, but even industry is pernicious. It consists solely in learning five or six words in some dead language. As soon as a man has got that stock under his belt, he need no longer worry about his fortune. In the cloister, he will find a peaceful life, which would have cost him sweat and tears in the world.

That's not all. The dervishes hold almost all the wealth of the state. They are a society of greedy people, who always take and never give in return. They accumulate revenue continuously, in order to acquire capital. All this

great wealth falls, so to speak, into paralysis: no more circulation of money, no more commerce, no more arts, no more manufactures.[258]

There is no Protestant prince who fails to raise more* taxes on his subjects than the Pope raises on his, and yet these latter are poor, and the former live in abundance. Commerce brings everything to the first; monasticism universally brings death to the others.

From Paris, the 26th of the Moon of Shahban, 1718.

LETTER CXVIII

Usbek to the same

We have no more to say about Asia and Europe. Let us move on to Africa. We can, practically speaking, discuss only its coasts, for the interior is not known.

The Barbary coasts, where the Mohammedan religion is established, are no more populous than they were at the time of the Romans, for reasons that I have already given. As to the coasts of Guinea, they must be seriously stripped these past two hundred years, as the minor kings, or village chiefs, keep selling their subjects to European princes to be carried off to their colonies in America.

What is more unusual is that this America, which receives so many new inhabitants annually, is itself a desert land and does not profit by the continued losses of Africa. The slaves, transported into another climate, die by the thousands. The working of mines, in which aborigines or foreigners are always used, the malignant vapors that come from them, the quicksilver that must be used constantly—all this destroys irreparably.

Nothing could be quite as extravagant as to cause the death of countless men in order to dig gold and silver from the earth. These metals are absolutely useless in themselves and represent wealth only because they were chosen to be its symbol.

From Paris, the last of the Moon of Shahban, 1718.

LETTER CXIX

Usbek to the same

The fertility of a nation depends sometimes on the most insignificant circumstances in the world; often only a new twist of imagination is needed to make it much more populous than it was.

The Jews, continually exterminated and continually reborn, have repaired their continual losses and destruction by the sole hope held by all their families—to see the birth of a powerful king who will be master of all the earth.

The ancient kings of Persia had so many thousands of subjects only because of the teaching of the Magi religion to the effect that the acts by which men can most please the Divinity are producing a child, tilling the soil, and planting a tree.[259]

If China nourishes such a teeming populace in her bosom, it is only the result of a certain way of thinking. For, since children think of their fathers as gods and respect them as such even in this life, and honor them after death by sacrifices in which they believe their souls, assumed into the tien,[260] resume a new life, therefore, every man is encouraged to increase his family, which is so submissive to him in this life and so necessary to him in the next.

On the other hand, Mohammedan countries become daily more deserted because of an opinion, which however sacred it may be, is not without ruinous effects when once rooted in minds. We picture ourselves as travelers who should think only of another country: the useful and lasting works, the cares we take to assure our children's fortunes, the projects that overreach the limits of a short, ephemeral existence—all these things seem superfluous to us. Calm for the present, and with no worry for the future, we take no pains to repair our public buildings, to bring virgin soil into cultivation, or to cultivate the soil already prepared for our care. We live in a general state of unfeelingness, and we leave everything up to providence.[261]

It was a spirit of vanity which established the unjust right of the eldest son among Europeans, a right unfavor-

able to propagation, since it centers the attention of a father on a single one of his children and distracts his eyes from all the others, since it obliges him, in order to assume the fortune of a single one, to oppose the establishment of the many, and finally, since it destroys that equality among citizens which is the source of affluence.

From Paris, the 4th of the Moon of Ramadan, 1718.

LETTER CXX

Usbek to the same

The countries inhabited by savages are usually not very populous by reason of the distaste almost all of them feel for working and tilling the soil. This unfortunate aversion is so strong that when they call down some imprecation against an enemy, they wish him no other evil save to be reduced to tilling the soil, for they believe that only hunting and fishing are noble occupations and worthy of them.

But, since there are often years when hunting and fishing produce very little, they suffer the desolation of frequent famines. In addition to this, there is no country so rich in game and fish that it can offer subsistence to a large population, for animals always flee areas of overpopulation.

Moreover, savage villages, numbering two or three hundred inhabitants, separated one from the other, and with interests as different as those of two empires, just cannot sustain themselves, for they do not possess the resource of great states where all the parts are mutually sympathetic and mutually assist each other.

Among savages there is another custom no less pernicious than the first, and that is the cruel custom of women to have themselves aborted so that pregnancy may not make them unattractive to their husbands.[262]

Here there exist terrible laws against such confusion; they are carried to the point of violence. Any girl who has not gone before a magistrate to declare her pregnancy is punished by death should the fruit of her womb perish.[263] Modesty, shame, even accident, cannot excuse her.

From Paris, the 9th of the Moon of Ramadan, 1718.

LETTER CXXI

Usbek to the same

The normal effect of colonies is to weaken the countries from which they are drawn, without populating those to which they are sent.

Men should stay where they are. Some illnesses can arise from changing good air for bad; others are due precisely to the fact that there has been any change of it at all.

The air is laden, as are plants, with particles of the earth of each country. This works on us in such a way that our temperament is thereby established. When we are transported to another country, we become ill. Liquids are accustomed to a certain consistency, solids to a certain disposition, and both are accustomed to a certain degree of movement past which they cannot tolerate others; thus they resist a new bent.* [264]

When a given country is undersettled, it is the fault of some particular vice in the nature of the terrain or the climate.* Thus, when men are torn away from propitious skies to be sent into such a country, just the opposite of what is hoped for gets accomplished.

The Romans knew all that through experience. They relegated all their criminals to Sardinia, and they had Jews transported there. They had to console themselves for their loss: a thing made very easy by the scorn they felt for these unfortunate people.

The great Shah Abbas, desirous of making it impossible for the Turks to maintain large armies on the frontier, transported almost all the Armenians out of their country and sent more than twenty thousand families of them into the province of Gilan[265] where almost all of them perished in a short time.[266]

None of the shipments of people tried by Constantinople ever succeeded.

The prodigious number of Negroes we talked about have not filled up America.

Since the destruction of the Jews under Hadrian, Palestine remains without inhabitants.

It must therefore be admitted that great destructions are almost irreparable, because a people that declines to

a certain degree will remain in that same condition. If, by chance, it is ever to become re-established, it would take centuries.

But if, in a weakened condition, the very least of the circumstances I have mentioned comes into play, not only does the people not re-establish itself, but it fritters away each day and leans toward complete annihilation.

The expulsion of the Moors from Spain can still be felt now as on the first day; far from this great void being filled, it grows larger every day.

Since the devastation of America, the Spanish who took the place of its former inhabitants have not been able to replenish the population. On the contrary, by a fatality that I should do better to call divine justice, the destroyers are destroying themselves and consuming themselves from day to day.

Princes ought not plan upon peopling great countries by means of colonies. I do not say that they don't sometimes succeed. There are some climates so propitious that the species will always multiply there. Take, for example, those islands populated by sick people who had been abandoned by several vessels and who immediately recovered their health there.[267]

But even should colonies succeed, instead of increasing the power of the mother country, they serve only to divide it—unless, of course, they be of minor size, like the colonies where people are sent to occupy some commercial position.[268]

Like the Spanish, the Carthaginians had discovered America, or at least, some large islands in which they set up a lucrative commercial enterprise. But when they noticed the number of their inhabitants declining, that wise republic forbade its subjects to continue such commerce and navigation.

Let me dare to say that instead of having Spaniards go to the Indies, we must have the Indians and half-castes come to Spain. That monarchy must have all its scattered people returned to it; if only the half of these great colonies were to be preserved, Spain would become the European power most to be feared.

One might compare an empire to a tree whose branches, too scattered, rob the trunk of all its sap and serve only to cast shadows.

Nothing could be better calculated to give princes a lesson against the madness of distant conquests than the example of the Spanish and Portuguese.

These two nations, having conquered immense kingdoms with amazing rapidity, were more astonished by their victories than were the conquered people by their defeat, and they pondered ways for consolidating the conquests. Each chose its own method of doing so.

The Spanish, despairing of ever holding their conquered nations by devotion, chose the expedient of destroying the natives and sending faithful citizens from Spain. A horrible plan was never more rapidly executed. The world saw a population as great as that of Europe disappear from the face of the earth upon the arrival of these barbarians, who appeared to have consciously discovered the Indies only so that they could disclose to mankind the last degree of cruelty.

By such barbarity, they kept the country under their domination. Judge by this case how deadly conquest can be, since its effects are such. For the frightful remedy was unique. How could they have held so many millions of men to obedience? How could they support a civil war from such a distance? What would have happened to the Spanish if they had given the natives time to recover from the admiration they felt upon the arrival of these new gods, and from the fear of their first thunderbolts? [269]

As for the Portuguese, they decided on quite a different course; they made use of no cruelty. And so they were driven out of all the countries they had discovered. The Dutch were behind the revolt of these peoples and profited from it.

What prince would envy the lot of conquerors? Who could desire conquest at such a price? The one group was immediately driven out, and the other created deserts and made a desert of its own country to boot.

It is the destiny of heroes either to destroy themselves in the conquest of a country they suddenly lose, or to subjugate nations they are forced of their own accord to destroy—just like that madman who consumed his means buying statues to throw into the sea, and mirrors to break as soon as they were purchased.[270]

From Paris, the 18th of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1718.

LETTER CXXII

Usbek to the same

Mildness of government contributes in a marvelous way to the propagation of the species.[271] All republics are a constant proof of this, and more than all the others, Switzerland and Holland, which is to say the worst countries in Europe if the nature of the terrain is taken into consideration. Yet they are the most populous.

Nothing will attract foreigners more than freedom and the abundance that always follows from it. The first is sought after for itself, and we are led by our needs to seek out the country where the other is found.

The human race multiplies in a country where abundance furnishes all the needs of children without in any way diminishing the subsistence of their fathers.

The very equality of citizens, which ordinarily produces equality of fortune, brings abundance and life into every organ of the body politic and extends such benefits generally.

The same cannot be said of countries subjected to arbitrary power: the prince, the courtiers, and a few individuals possess all the wealth, while the others moan in extreme poverty.

If a man is not well off and feels that he will produce children even poorer than himself, he will not marry; if he marries, he will be afraid of having too many children, who might finish off the paternal fortune and thus drop lower than their father's status.

I admit that the countryman or peasant, once married, will produce progeny indifferently whether he be poor or rich. Such a consideration does not touch him. He possesses a constant heritage to leave to his children—his grub ax—and nothing will prevent him from blindly following his natural instinct.

But of what use to a state is this great number of children wasting away in poverty? They practically all perish as soon as they are born. They never prosper: weak and debilitated, they die off singly in a thousand different ways, while they are carried off wholesale by the frequent epidemics that poverty and undernourishment always pro-

duce. Those who escape such ravages reach the age of manhood without the strength for it, and they waste away for the rest of their lives.

Men are like plants: they never grow well unless they are well cultivated. Among people living in poverty, the human race loses and even degenerates.

France can furnish an example of all of this. In past wars the fear of being enlisted in the army, which plagued every family, forced the children to marry,[272] and that at too tender an age and in the midst of poverty. From all these marriages were born many children; to this day you can go looking for them in France all you like: poverty, famine, and sickness have caused them to disappear.

And if, under such a fortunate sky and in as orderly a kingdom as France, such remarks can be made, what do you think it must be like in other states?

From Paris, the 23rd of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1718.

LETTER CXXIII

Usbek to the mullah Mehemet Ali, guardian of the three tombs in Qum

Of what use to us are the fastings of imams and the hair shirts of mullahs? The hand of God has twice weighed heavy upon the children of the law. The sun grows dim and seems no longer to light up anything but their defeats. Their armies assemble and are blown apart like dust.

The Osmanli empire is shaken by the two greatest setbacks it has ever known.[273] A Christian mufti barely manages to hold it together.[274] The grand vizier of Germany is the scourge of God, sent to punish the followers of Omar.[275] He brings everywhere with him the wrath of heaven incensed by their rebellion and perfidy.

O sacred spirit of the imams, thou weepest night and day over those children of the Prophet, who have been set on the evil path by the hated Omar. Thy compassion is moved by the sight of their misfortunes. Thou desirest their conversion and not their destruction. Thou wouldst glory to see them reunited by the tears of the Saints, under

the standard of Ali and no longer dispersed throughout mountain and desert by their terror of the infidels.

From Paris, the 1st of the
Moon of Shalval, 1718.

LETTER CXXIV *

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice*

What possible motive can be behind those enormous gratuities poured forth by princes on their courtiers? Do they seek to secure their favor? They already belong to the prince as completely as possible. Moreover, if princes acquire some of their subjects by buying them, then by the same token they are forced to lose a multitude of others by making them poor.

When I think of the situation of princes, always surrounded by greedy and insatiable men, I can only pity them, and I pity them even more when they are without the strength to resist personal requests, always burdensome to those who ask for nothing.

I never hear talk of their liberality, their favors, and their royal annuities without giving myself over to a thousand reflections. A whole crowd of ideas comes to my mind, and I seem to hear the following edict pronounced:

"The untiring courage of some of our subjects in asking us for annuities having pitilessly harassed our royal magnificence, we have finally given in to the multitude of requests with which we have been flooded and which have up to now caused the greatest solicitude to the throne. They point out to us that since our accession to the crown, they have never missed being present at our *lever*, that we have always noticed them, stiff as milestones, as we pass by, and further, that they raised themselves up to an extreme height, on the highest shoulders, in order to behold Our Serene Highness. We have even received several requests from subjects of the fair sex begging us to pay due heed to the fact that they are noteworthy for being difficult to approach. Some of them, somewhat superannuated, have even begged us, with heads bobbing, to take notice of the fact that they were the adornment of the courts of our predecessor kings, and that if the

army generals have made the state fearful by their military deeds, then they have made the court no less famous by their intrigue. Thus, wishing to treat our suppliants with kindness and to grant all their wishes, we have ordered as follows:

"That all farm workers having five children, cut off a fifth of the bread given to them each day. Let us encourage fathers to reduce the ration to each of the children as equitably as possible.

"Let us expressly forbid all those who work hard at cultivating and investing their inheritance, or those who have farmed it out, to make any improvement whatever to it.

"Let us command that all persons who carry out base and mechanical work and who have never been to the *lever* of Our Majesty buy henceforth no clothes for themselves, their wives, and their children except once every four years. Let us, in addition, forbid very strictly those little, family parties they used to hold on the chief feast days of the year.*

"And since we remain advised that the majority of the burghers in our better cities are entirely taken up with launching daughters, who manage to achieve some reputation in our state only by reason of their sad and boring modesty, we order that they shall wait to marry them off until, having reached the age limit given in our ordinances, the daughters come and force them to do so. Let us forbid our magistrates to provide for the education of their children."

From Paris, the 1st of the
Moon of Shalval, 1718.*

LETTER CXXV

Rica to ——

For every religion, there has always existed the embarrassing problem of giving some idea of the pleasures awaiting those who have lived well. One can easily terrify the wicked with a long list of threatened punishments. But as for the virtuous, it is not easy to know what to promise them. It seems that it is of the very nature of pleasures to be of short duration; imagination finds it difficult to picture any others.

I have seen descriptions of paradise capable of making

all sensible people give it up. Some have the happy shades playing a flute eternally; others condemn them to taking strolls forever; still others, who have them dreaming up there of their mistresses here below, have not realized that a hundred million years constitute a sufficiently long time to remove the taste for such amorous concerns.

On this score I remember a story I heard told by a man who had been in the country of the Mogul. It makes clear that Indian priests are no less sterile than others in their ideas on the pleasures of paradise.

A woman who had just lost her husband came ceremoniously to the governor of the city to ask his permission to burn herself. However, since in countries under Moslem rule this cruel custom is abolished as much as possible, the governor absolutely refused her request.[276]

When she saw that her pleas were powerless, she threw herself into a furious fit of anger. "Just see," she said, "how a person is restricted! A poor woman is not even to be granted the right to burn herself when she wants to! Has anyone ever seen anything quite like this before? My mother, my aunt, my sisters, all burned themselves, and when I come along to ask permission from this cursed governor, he grows angry and starts to shout like a madman."

There happened to be there, by chance, a young bonze.[277] "Unfaithful man," said the governor to him, "is it you who put that madness into the mind of this woman?"

"No," replied the bonze, "I have never spoken to her. But if she were to listen to me, she would carry out her sacrifice. She will be committing an act pleasing to the God Brahma. And she will be well rewarded, for in the next world she will find her husband and will begin a second marriage with him."

"What's that you say?" asked the surprised woman. "I am to find my husband again? Ah, then don't burn me. He was jealous and morose, and what's more, so old that if the God Brahma hasn't made some changes in him, he surely has no need for me. Burn myself for him! . . . Not so much as the tip of my finger to get him out of the depths of hell. Those two old bonzes who seduced me and knew how I lived with him were careful not to tell me everything. But if the God Brahma has only that in store as a

reward for me, I refuse such a blessing. Mister Governor, I am turning Mohammedan. And as for you," she said, turning toward the bonze, "you can go along, if you like, and tell my husband that I am in excellent health." [278]

From Paris, the 2nd of the
Moon of Shalval, 1718.

LETTER CXXVI

Rica to Usbek in ——

I expect you here tomorrow. Still I am sending along your letters from Ispahan. My letters inform me that the ambassador of the Great Mogul has received orders to leave the kingdom. It is added that the Prince, uncle of the King and responsible for his education, has been arrested and taken to a castle, where he is kept under strict guard and deprived of all his honors. I am touched by the fate of the Prince, and I pity him.[279]

I must confess, Usbek, that I have never been able to watch anyone shed tears without being touched.[280] I feel compassion for the unfortunate, as if they were the only ones who were men; and even the mighty, against whom I find my heart hardened when they are exalted, these I love as soon as they are fallen.

Actually what need do they have in prosperous times for useless tenderness? That comes too close to equality. They much prefer a respect that requires nothing in return. But once they have fallen from their greatness, only our commiseration can recall the memory of it.

I find something quite disarming and even quite great in the words of a prince who, about to fall into his enemies' hands and seeing his courtiers weeping around him, said to them: "I can sense from your tears that I am still your king." [281]

From Paris, the 3rd of the
Moon of Shalval, 1718.

LETTER CXXVII

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

You have many times heard people talk about the famous King of Sweden. He was laying siege to a fortress in a kingdom called Norway. As he was visiting the trenches,

alone except for one engineer, he received a blow on the head, from which he died. Immediately, his prime minister was arrested. The assembly met and condemned him to the headsman's ax.[282]

He was accused of a great crime: that of having spread calumny on the nation and having caused it to lose the trust of its king—a crime worthy, to my way of thinking, of a thousand deaths.

For after all, if it is a reprehensible action to sully the lowliest of his subjects in the mind of a prince, what must it be to sully the whole nation and rob it of the favor of the man ordained by providence to create its welfare?

I should like men to talk to kings as the angels speak to our Holy Prophet.

You know that in the holy feasts when the Lord of Lords descends from the highest throne of earth to communicate with his slaves, I have made it a strict habit to enslave an unruly tongue. I have never been known to loose a single word that could prove bitter to the lowliest of his subjects. Whenever I had to cease being discreet in speech, I did not in any way cease being an honorable man, and in this proof of our fidelity, I have risked my life but never my virtue.

I can't explain how it happens that there is practically never a prince so wicked as not to have a minister who is even more so. If he commits some evil act, it is practically always one that was suggested to him; thus it can be said that the ambition of princes is never as dangerous as the baseness of their counselors' souls. But can you comprehend how a man who has been minister only as of yesterday and will perhaps no longer be there tomorrow can in one moment, become the enemy of himself, of his family, of his country, and of the generations yet to be born now and forever from the people he is about to oppress?

A prince has passions; the minister stirs them up. It is in this direction that he leads his whole ministry. He has no other aim, nor does he want to hear of any other. The courtiers seduce the prince with their praise, and the minister flatters him even more dangerously by his counsel, by the aims he inspires in him, and by the maxims he proposes.

From Paris, the 25th of the
Moon of Saphar, 1719.

LETTER CXXVIII

Rica to Usbek in ——

The other day I was crossing over the Pont-neuf with one of my friends. He met one of his acquaintances who, he said, was a geometer; all the earmarks were there, for he was lost in deep meditation. My friend had to tug for some time at his sleeve and to shake him to pull him down to his level, so absorbed was the man in a curve that had been tormenting him perhaps for the past week. They exchanged many polite formulas as well as some literary news. This conversation brought them up to the door of a café, and I went in with them.

I noticed that our geometer was received by everyone with enthusiasm and that the waiters gave more attention to him than to two musketeers seated in a corner. As for himself, he seemed to feel pleasantly at home there, for he unfurrowed his face somewhat and began to laugh as if he possessed not the least tincture of geometry.

And yet this orderly mind measured everything said in the conversation. He was like a man who, in a garden, lops off with his sword the heads of all flowers that stand higher than the others. A martyr to his strict standards, he was offended by a gross sally just as the eyes are sometimes offended by a light that is too strong. Nothing was indifferent to him provided it were true. His conversation, therefore, was rather unusual. He had arrived that morning from the country with a man who had seen a superb chateau with magnificent gardens, whereas he himself had seen only a building, sixty by thirty-five feet with a rectangular grove a thousand perches square in area. He would very much have liked to see the rules of perspective adhered to in such a way that the paths of the avenues might be of the same width, and he had an infallible method for carrying it out. He seemed quite contented with a strangely constructed dial that he had decoded out there, but he grew very angry at a scholar close by me who unfortunately asked whether the dial indicated Babylonian hours. A writer spoke of the shelling of the chateau of Fuenterrabia,[283] and our man gave us immediately the properties of the trajectory described in the air by the

shells, and charmed at knowing that, had no interest at all in hearing about the success of the bombardment. A man complained of having being ruined the winter before by a flood. "What you are telling me is most pleasant," said the geometer at this point. "I can see that I was not in error on the calculation I made and that at least two more inches of rain fell on the earth this year than fell last year."

A few seconds later, he left and we followed him. Since he went along rather fast and neglected completely to look where he was going, he collided head on with another man. There was a violent shock, and from this blow they bounced back, each in his own direction as a reciprocal result of their speed and mass. When they had recovered somewhat from their surprise, this man, putting his hand to his forehead, said to the geometer: "I am so glad you bumped into me because I have great news for you. I have just given my Horace to the public."

"What?" answered the geometer, "but he's been out for two thousand years!"

"You don't understand," rejoined the first, "it's a translation of that ancient author I have just brought out. For twenty years now I have been busy making translations."

"What, Sir?" said the geometer, "for twenty years then you haven't been thinking? You talk for others and they do your thinking for you?"

"Sir," answered the scholar, "do you not think I have rendered the public a great service in making them familiar with good authors?"

"I'm not saying quite that. I have as much esteem as any man for the sublime men of genius whom you travesty. But you are not at all like them, for if you are always busy translating, no one will ever translate you. Translations are like those copper coins that, to be sure, have the same value as a gold piece and are even much more circulated by the masses, but are always weak currency and poor in monetary standard. Your wish, as you say, is to rejuvenate among us those illustrious departed ones. I admit that you do give them a body, but you don't bring life back to them. The spirit capable of bringing them to life is always missing. Why don't you apply yourself to the research of the host of beautiful truths that simple calculation allows us to discover daily?"

After that bit of advice, they took leave, very dissatisfied, I believe, one with the other.

From Paris, the last of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1719.

LETTER CXXIX*

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

Most legislators have been men pushed by chance to leadership over others, limited men who have never consulted anything beyond their own prejudices and fancies.[284]

They seem not to have been aware of the very greatness and importance of their own work. Amusing themselves at establishing puerile institutions, they have conformed, to be sure, to little minds, but have been discredited by people with common sense.

They have thrown themselves into useless details; they have bogged down in particulars—which is proof of a narrow mind capable of seeing things only in detail and not of embracing anything like a general view.

Some of them have had the affectation of using a language other than the vernacular—an absurd practice for a lawgiver. How can laws be observed if they can't be understood?

Sometimes they have unnecessarily abolished laws already in force, that is to say, they have thrown the masses into the inevitable disorder accompanying change.

It is true that out of a singularity arising more from man's nature than from his mind, it is sometimes necessary to change certain laws. But the case is a rare one, and when it does happen, the laws should be touched only with trembling hand. So much solemnity and so many precautions should be brought to bear that the people naturally conclude that laws are sacred, since so much formality is needed to change them.[285]

Often laws have been made too subtle and have followed ideas of pure logic rather than of natural equity. Later, these laws have been found to be too harsh, and in a spirit of justice, it was thought we should get away from them. But this remedy was a new disease. Whatever the laws may be, they must always be followed, and

considered as the public conscience to which the individual conscience should always conform.

It must be admitted that some legislators have shown a concern that bears testimony to much wisdom: to wit, they have granted fathers a great authority over their children.[286] Nothing can be so helpful to the magistrate; nothing can clean out the courts so well; nothing, in fine, can bring so much calm into a state where morals always make better citizens than laws.

Of all the powers granted, this one is the least abused. It is the one held most sacred by all the judges; it is the only one that does not depend on conventions, the one that predates conventions.

It can be seen that in countries where more punishment and reward is entrusted to paternal hands, families are much better run. Fathers are the image of the Creator of the universe, who although he can lead men by his love, does not give up attaching them to him also by motives of hope and fear.

I shall not finish this letter without pointing out to you the extravagance of the French mind. It is said that the French have preserved from Roman law a great number of useless things, and even worse, that they did not take from that law the paternal power that had been established in it as the prime legitimate authority.[287]

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1719.

LETTER CXXX

Rica to ——

I shall write to you in this letter about a tribe called the *nouvellistes* or columnists, who meet in a magnificent garden where their idleness is always kept busy.[288] They are very useless to the state, and their fifty-year conversations have had an effect no different than the same years of silence would have managed to produce. They think themselves very important, however, because they talk about magnificent projects and discuss great affairs.

The basis of their conversations is a frivolous and ridiculous curiosity. There is no closet so mysterious that they do not hope to penetrate it; they would not possibly

admit to remaining uninformed about anything. They know how many women our august sultan has, how many babies he produces every year, and although they spend nothing on spies, they are informed of the measures he takes to humiliate the emperors of the Turks and the Moguls.

They have scarcely exhausted the present when they are already rushing off into the future; preceding providence, they inform it of all the movements of men. They take a general by the hand, and having praised him for a thousand foolish acts he has not committed, they lay out for him a thousand more he will not commit.

They cause armies to fly like cranes, cause fortresses to fall like cardboard. They have bridges over every river, secret roads through every mountain, immense storehouses in the burning sands. All they lack is common sense.

I am staying with a man who received this letter from a *nouvelliste*. Because it seemed so strange to me, I kept it. And here it is:

Sir:

I am rarely mistaken in my predictions of current events.

On the first of January 1711, I predicted that the Emperor Joseph would die during the year. It is true that, since he was in perfectly good health, I thought I should get myself laughed at if I were to express myself in completely clear terms, which explains why I made use of somewhat vague terms. But people who knew how to use their heads understood me quite well. On April 17 of that year, he died of smallpox.

As soon as the war was declared between the Emperor and the Turks, I went off to hunt down my men in every corner of the Tuileries. I brought them together near the fountain and predicted to them that Belgrade would suffer a siege and be taken. I have been fortunate enough to see my prediction accomplished. It is true that, toward the middle of the siege, I wagered one hundred pistoles that it would be taken on August 18.[289] It was actually taken the next day. Can a man lose with a hand like that?

When I realized that the Spanish fleet was landing in Sardinia, I decided Spain would conquer the island. I said so, and it turned out true. Puffed-up with that

success, I added that the victorious fleet would go on and would land at Finale and conquer Milan. As I found some resistance in having that opinion accepted, I wanted to defend my cause gloriously. I wagered fifty pistoles, and I lost again. Finally that devil of an Alberoni[290] despite the treaty terms, sent his fleet to Sicily and thus deceived at once two great political thinkers —the Duke of Savoy and myself.

All of this, Sir, has upset me so much that I have resolved to continue predicting but never to bet any more. In times past the habit of wagering was unknown at the Tuileries, and the late Monsieur the Count of L——,[291] would not tolerate it at all. But now that a whole herd of fops has gotten mixed in among us, we don't know where we stand any more. We scarcely get our mouths open to make a prediction when one of those young fellows offers to wager against it.

The other day, as I was opening my manuscript and settling my glasses on my nose, one of those braggarts, snatching at the very interval between my first and second words, said to me: "I'll wager one hundred pistoles that it's not so."

I pretended not to have noticed this impertinence, and continuing my remarks in a somewhat louder voice, I said: "Monsieur the Maréchal of ——, having learned . . ."

"That is false," he said. "You are always purveying extravagant news; there's not an ounce of common sense in what you say."

I beg of you, Sir, do me the favor of lending me thirty pistoles, for I confess that these wagers have incommoded me very much. I am sending you copies of two letters I have written to the Minister.

I am, Sir, your etc.

LETTERS OF A NOUVELLISTE TO THE MINISTER

My Lord:

I am the most zealous subject the King has ever had. I am the one who obliged one of my friends to carry out a project, formed by me, of writing a book to show that Louis the Great was greater than all princes who have earned the title of great. I have been working for some time on another work, which will do even more honor to our nation if Your Grace will accord me a privilege. My idea is to prove that from the beginning of the monarchy, the French have never

been beaten and that what historians have said up to now about our losses are veritable falsehoods. I must correct them on many occasions, and I dare to believe that I excel particularly in criticism.

I am, Sir, etc.

My Lord:

Since the loss we suffered in the death of Monsieur The Count of L——, we beg you to be so good as to allow us to elect a president. Disorder breaks in on our meetings, and the affairs of state are no longer treated with the same discussion as in the past. Our young men live absolutely without regard for their elders, and among themselves, without discipline. It is the very council of Rehoboam,[292] where the young take advantage of the old. We point out to them in vain that we were in peaceful possession of the Tuileries twenty years before they were born. I believe that they will end up by chasing us out, that we shall be obliged to leave these precincts where we have so often evoked the shades of our French heroes, and that we shall be forced to hold our meeting in the Jardin du Roi[293] or in some other more distant spot.

I am, Sir, your etc.

From Paris, the 7th of the
Moon of Gemmadi II, 1719.

LETTER CXXXI

Rhedi to Rica in Paris

One of the things that most piqued my curiosity when I came to Europe was the origin and history of republics. You know that most Asiatics haven't the slightest idea of this kind of government and that their imagination has never served to help them understand that governments other than despotisms can exist on this earth.[294]

The first governments we know about were monarchies. It was only by chance, and through the succession of centuries, that republics were formed.

Greece, having been wiped out by a flood, was settled by new peoples. She drew practically all her colonies from Egypt and the nearest Asian territories, and since these countries were ruled by kings, the peoples who came from them were governed in the same way. But the tyranny of these princes became too great; the peoples shook off the

yoke, and from the ruins of so many kingdoms there arose those republics that caused Greece to flower so profusely, alone civilized among the barbarians.[295]

Love of liberty and hate of kings preserved Greece for a long time in independence, and extended the republican form of government far and wide. Greek cities found allies in Asia Minor; there they established colonies as free as themselves, and these colonies served them as ramparts against the machinations of Persian kings. Nor is that all: Greece settled Italy, Spain, and perhaps Gaul. It is known that the great Hesperia, so famous among the ancients, was in the beginning Greece and that her neighbors regarded her as a realm of felicity. The Greeks themselves, not finding that happy realm at home, went looking for it in Italy; the Italians went looking for it in Spain; the Spanish, in Baetica or in Portugal. Thus all these regions bore the name of Hesperia among the ancients. These Greek colonies carried along with them a spirit of freedom which they had imbibed in that sweet country. Thus in primitive times, monarchies were scarcely to be found in Italy, Spain, and Gaul. You will soon see that the northern peoples and the Germans were no less free. If some vestige of royalty can be found among them, it is because army chieftains or heads of republics were taken for kings.[296]

All this took place in Europe, for Asia and Africa have always been weighed down under despotism, unless you make an exception of some cities in Asia Minor of which we have spoken, and of Carthage in Africa.

The world was divided between two powerful republics: Rome and Carthage. Nothing is better known than the beginnings of the Roman republic; nothing is so little known as the origin of Carthage. The succession of African princes after Dido is absolutely unknown, and equally unknown is how they lost their power. The prodigious growth of the Roman republic would have been a great boon to the whole world if there had not existed that unjust differentiation between Roman citizens and conquered peoples, if less authority had been granted to provincial governors, if the sacred laws against tyranny had been observed, and if to silence those laws the governors had not used the same treasures amassed by their injustice.*

Caesar oppressed the Roman republic and submitted it to arbitrary power.

Europe lamented long under a cruel military government, and Roman gentleness was changed into cruel oppression.

Meanwhile an endless succession of unknown nations came out of the north, spread like a torrent over the Roman provinces, and finding it just as easy to make conquests as to practice piracy, dismembered the Empire and founded kingdoms.* Those peoples were free, and they so stringently limited the authority of their kings that these were, properly speaking, only chieftains or generals. Thus their kingdoms, although founded by force, never felt the yoke of the conqueror. When the Asian peoples, like the Turks and the Tatars, made conquests, ruled as they were by the will of a single man, they thought only of giving him new subjects and establishing his violent authority by force of arms. But the northern peoples, free in their own countries, did not give their chieftains great authority when taking over Roman provinces. Some of these peoples, such as the Vandals in Africa, the Goths in Spain, even deposed their kings as soon as they were dissatisfied with them. With other peoples, the prince's authority was limited in a thousand different ways. A great number of lords shared it with him; wars were undertaken only with the consent of the people; spoils were shared between chief and soldiers; there was no tax levied for the benefit of the prince; laws were made in national assemblies. These are the fundamental principles of all the states formed out of the remains of the Roman Empire.[297]

From Venice, the 20th of the
Moon of Rhegeb, 1719.

LETTER CXXXII

Rica to ——

Five or six months ago, I was in a café. There I noticed a rather well-dressed gentleman holding forth and getting an audience. He spoke of the pleasure of living in Paris and deplored his fate of being forced to go off and pine away in the provinces. "I have," he said, "fifteen thousand

livres of income in land, and I should consider myself lucky if I had a quarter of it in money or in estate capable of being moved about freely. Try as I may to push my farmers and weigh them down with costs of lawsuits, I manage only to make them less solvent. I have never been able to see one hundred pistoles all together at one time. If I owed ten thousand francs, they would have to seize all my property, and I should be in the poorhouse."

I left without having paid much attention to this whole speech. However, finding myself yesterday in the same neighborhood, I went into the same house and saw there a serious man, with drawn, pale face, who seemed sad and pensive in the midst of five or six talkers, until, taking the floor suddenly and raising his voice, he said: "Yes, I am a ruined man. I have nothing to live on any more, for at the present moment I have in my house only two hundred thousand livres in bank notes and one hundred thousand écus in silver.[298] I am in a frightful situation. I thought I was rich, and here I am in the poorhouse. If only I had a small property to which I could retire, at least I should have something to eat. But I don't have enough land to fill this hat."

By chance, I turned my head in the other direction and saw another man making the grimaces of a madman. "Whom can a man trust any more?" he cried. "There is a certain traitor of whose friendship I was so sure that I lent him my money. And he paid it back! What horrible deception! He may do as he likes now; he will always remain discredited in my mind." [299]

Very close by was another man, very badly dressed, who, as he lifted his eyes to heaven, was saying: "May God bless the projects of our ministers! Grant I may see the price of stock shares at two thousand, and all the lackeys of Paris richer than their masters!" I was curious to know his name.

"He's an extremely poor fellow," I was told. "And so he follows a poor profession. He's a genealogist, and he hopes his talents will pay off if big fortunes continue and all the newly rich need him to make over their names, clean up their ancestral lines, and decorate their coaches. He pictures himself making gentlemen of quality to his heart's content, and he trembles with joy as he sees his trade growing."

Finally, I saw a pale and dried-up old man come in, and I recognized him as a newsmonger even before he sat down. He was not of that number who have a victorious assurance against every reversal and always foresee successes and trophies. On the contrary, he was one of those tremblers with only sad news. "Things are going very badly down in Spain," he said. "We have no cavalry on the frontier, and it is to be feared that Prince Pio, who has a large corps of cavalry, will lay all of Languedoc under contribution." [300]

Just opposite me there was a somewhat disheveled philosopher, who considered the newsmonger with pity and kept shrugging his shoulders as the other continued to raise his voice. I drew closer to the philosopher, and he whispered in my ear: "You can see for yourself how that fool has been bending our ears for an hour about his terror for Languedoc. Now I, yesterday evening, saw a spot on the sun which if it were to grow, could cause all of creation to fall into a torpor, and I have not said a single word about it."

From Paris, the 17th of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1719.

LETTER CXXXIII

Rica to ——

The other day I went to visit a great library in a monastery of dervishes who are, so to speak, entrusted with it but obliged to let everyone into it at certain fixed hours.[301]

As I went in, I saw a serious man walking about in the midst of the countless volumes surrounding him. I went up to him and begged him to identify for me a certain section of books, for I could see they were better bound than all the others. "Sir," he said, "I am living in a foreign land here; I don't know anyone. Many people ask me similar questions, but you may be sure I am not going to read all these books just to satisfy them. I have a librarian who will take care of you, for he is busy day and night figuring out everything you see here. He's a good-for-nothing and quite a burden to us, for he doesn't work for the monastery at all. But I can hear refectory bell

ringing. Those who, like myself, are at the head of a community should be the first at all services." And so saying, the monk pushed me out, closed the door, and as if he had flown, disappeared from my view.

From Paris, the 21st of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1719.

LETTER CXXXIV

Rica to the same

The next day I returned to that library, where I saw a man quite different from the one I had seen the first time. His manner was simple, his countenance spiritual, and his reception affable. As soon as I had made my curiosity known to him, he set about satisfying it, and even, since I was a foreigner, explaining things to me.

"My father," I said, "what are those stout volumes filling up that whole side of the library?"

"Those are the interpreters of the Holy Scripture," he replied.

"There certainly are a lot of them," I rejoined. "The Scripture must have been obscure in times past and quite clear now. Are there any doubtful points left? Can there still be points of contest?"

"Merciful God, are there? Are there ever!" he replied. "There are almost as many as there are lines of print."

"Is that so?" I said. "Then what were all those authors doing?"

"Those authors," he replied, "were not looking in the Scripture for what you must believe, but rather for what they themselves believed. They didn't think of it as a book containing the dogmas they should accept, but rather as a work capable of giving authority to their own ideas. That is why they have corrupted the meaning and put every passage through torture. It is a country in which men of every sect make raids and march as if to pillage; it is a battlefield where the embattled enemy nations stage many combats, where they attack and skirmish in many ways.

"Nearby you'll see ascetic books or books of devotion. Then come books on morality, much more useful; then theology, doubly incomprehensible both by reason of the

subject treated and by the method of treating it; then come works of the mystics—that is, works of the devout with tender hearts."

"Ah, my father," I said, "just a moment! Don't go so fast! Speak to me about these mystics."

"Sir," he said, "the life of devotion warms up a heart prone to tenderness and causes it to send spirits to the brain, which is warmed in its turn—whence arise ecstasy and rapture. That state is the delirium of religious devotion. Often it perfects itself, or rather, degenerates into quietism. You know that a quietist is nothing but a madman, libertine and devout at the same time.

"Consider the casuists, who bring out into the daylight all the secrets of night, and form in their imaginations all the monsters that the demon of love can produce, bring them together, compare them, and make them the eternal object of their thoughts. Fortunate for them if the heart does not get into the matter and become itself an accomplice of so many naïvely described and nakedly painted aberrations!

"You can see, sir, that I am a freethinker and that I tell you everything I am thinking. I am naturally frank and much more so with you, since you are a foreigner who wants to know things and know them as they are. If I chose to, I should speak to you of all this only with admiration, and I should say over and over: 'That is divine; that is worthy of respect; there is something miraculous here.' And one of two things would then happen: either I should deceive you, or I should lower myself in your opinion."

We called a halt there; a duty falling to the dervish broke off our conversation until the next day.

From Paris, the 23rd of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1719.

LETTER CXXXV

*Rica to the same**

I returned at the agreed time, and my man led me to the same spot where we had taken leave of each other. "Here," said he, "are all the grammarians, the glossarists, and the commentators."

"My father," I asked him, "cannot all these people dispense with the rules of common sense?"

"Yes," said he, "they can, and it doesn't even show. Their works are not any the worse for it, and that's very convenient for them."

"That is true," I said, "and I know many philosophers who would do well to apply themselves to that sort of science."

"Here," he continued, "are the orators who possess the talent of persuading without recourse to reason, and the geometers who force a man to be persuaded despite himself and convince him tyrannically.

"Here are the metaphysical books, which treat of such great matters, and in which infinity is everywhere to be found; then here are the books of natural philosophy, which find nothing more miraculous in the vast universe than exists in the simplest machine of our artisans.

"Then, the books of medicine, those monuments to the fragility of nature and the power of art, capable of making a man tremble even when they treat of the most insignificant diseases, so real do they make death to us. But they give us a sense of complete security when they speak of the efficacy of their remedies, as if we had become immortal.

"Just nearby them are books on anatomy, which contain not so much a description of the parts of the human body as the barbarous names given to them—a thing that cures neither the sick man of his ill, nor the doctor of his ignorance.

"Here is chemistry—sometimes at home in the poorhouse and sometimes in the madhouse, equally fitting domiciles for it.

"Here are books on occult science, or rather, on occult ignorance. Such are the ones containing some sort of diabolism—execrable according to most people; pitiful to me. Such are also the books of judicial astrology."

"What do you mean, my father? Books of judicial astrology?" I asked vociferously. "Why, those are the ones we hold in the greatest esteem in Persia; they rule all the actions of our lives and decide for us in all our undertakings. Astrologers are really our religious directors. They are more than that; they take part in the governing of the state." [302]

"If that is so," he replied, "you are living under a yoke much harsher than the yoke of reason. Yours is the strangest of empires. I surely pity a family and even more a nation that lets itself fall under the domination of the planets to such an extent."

"We use astrology," I said, "in the same way you use algebra. Each nation has its science, according to which it determines its policies. All the astrologers together have never committed so many foolish things in Persia as a single one of your algebraists has done here. Do you not believe that the fortuitous conjunction of stars is as certain a guide as the fine reasoning of your system maker? [303] If the votes were to be counted on that matter in France and Persia, it would make a fine triumph for astrology. You would see your calculators* quite humiliated. What a deadly corollary one could draw against them!"

Our dispute was interrupted, and we had to part.

From Paris, the 26th of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1719.

LETTER CXXXVI

Rica to the same

In our following meeting, my scholar led me to a private study. "Here are books on modern history," he said. "You will see, first of all, historians of the Church and the Popes, books that I read for my edification, books that often have quite the contrary effect on me.

"Over there are the historians who wrote of the decline of the formidable Roman Empire, which was formed from the remains of so many monarchies, and from which, at its fall, so many new ones were formed.[304] Uncounted numbers of barbarian peoples, as unknown as the countries they inhabited, suddenly appeared; they overflooded, ravaged, and dismembered it, and then founded all the kingdoms you now see in Europe. Properly speaking these tribes were not barbarian, for they were free. But they have become barbarian since the day when, being subjected for the most part to an absolute authority,

they lost that sweet liberty so in conformity with reason, humanity, and nature.

"Here you see the historians of the German Empire, which is only a shadow of the first empire, but which is the only power on earth, I think, not weakened by division, the only one, to my mind, that strengthens itself after each loss, and that although slow to profit by its successes, becomes indomitable by its defeats.

"Here are the historians of France; in them one can first see the power of kings form, die twice, be twice reborn, and then languish during several centuries. But then, gathering forces bit by bit, augmented from every side, you see it rise to its final period, like a river that loses its water, or hides underground, during its course, but then reappears swollen by tributaries, and rapidly carries along all that is an obstacle to its passage.

"Here, you will see the Spanish nation issue forth from a couple of mountains, and the Moslem princes subjugated just as gradually as they had conquered rapidly: so many kingdoms united into a vast monarchy, which became almost the only one until, weighed down under her own greatness* and her artificial wealth, she lost her strength and even her reputation and kept only the pride of her former power.

"Here are the historians of England, where again and again liberty can be seen arising from the fires of discord and sedition. Here the prince is ever tottering on an unshakable throne. Here you can see an impatient nation, wise in its very fury, which, having become mistress of the seas (a thing never before seen), mixes commerce with empire.

"Nearby are the historians of that other queen of the sea, the republic of Holland, so respected in Europe and so feared in Asia, where her business men behold so many kings prostrated before them.

"The historians of Italy give the picture of a nation that was formerly mistress of the world and is today the slave of all other nations, as well as of her weak, divided princes, who lack all other attributes of sovereignty save a hopeless policy.

"Here are the historians of republics: of Switzerland, the very image of liberty; of Venice, with no other re-

source save its economy; of Genoa, rich only by reason of its ships.

"Here are the historians of the North, and among others, of Poland, which abuses so badly its freedom and its right to elect its kings that it thereby seems to want to console its neighboring peoples, who have lost both."

And on those words, we parted until the following day.

From Paris, the 2nd of the
Moon of Shalval, 1719.

LETTER CXXXVII

Rica to the same

The next day, he led me to another study. "Here are the poets," he said, "I mean those authors whose job it is to put shackles to common sense and to bury reason under embellishment, just as in times past women were laid to rest under their finery and jewels. You are familiar with them. They are not rare in the Orient, where the more ardent sun seems to set fire to imagination itself.

"Here are the epic poems."

"Eh! what are epic poems?"

"To be truthful," he replied, "I don't know. Those who know say that only two have ever been written and all the others given this name are not epic at all. I wouldn't know about that either. They say further that it is impossible to write new ones, and that, I find even more surprising.

"Here are the dramatic poets, who to my way of thinking, are the poets par excellence and the masters of passion. There are two kinds of them: comic poets, who move us ever so gently, and tragic poets, who trouble and disturb us so violently.

"Here are the lyric poets, whom I scorn as much as I esteem the last, and who make of their art a harmonious extravagance.

"Next you see the authors of idyls and eclogues, who please even the court with the notion they give of a kind of tranquillity that does not exist there and that they show as existing in the shepherd's lot.[305]

"Of all the authors we have seen, here are the most dangerous—I mean those who sharpen epigrams, those little loosed darts that inflict deep wounds, inaccessible to all remedy.

"Here you see the novels, whose authors are a kind of poet, exaggerating equally the language of the mind and that of the heart. They pass their whole lives looking for nature, and they always miss it. Their heroes are as strange to nature as winged dragons and centaurs."

"I have seen some of your novels," I said, "and if you were to see ours, you would be even more shocked. They are just as unnatural, and moreover, extremely cramped by our customs. Ten years must be passed before a lover can even get to see the face of his mistress. Meanwhile, the authors are forced to make the reader pass over those boring preliminaries. Now, it is impossible to keep the incidents varied. And they have recourse to an artifice that is even worse than the very disease they are trying to cure—I mean to miracles. I am sure you would not approve of a lady magician making a whole army appear from underground or of a hero singlehandedly destroying an army of a hundred thousand men. Nevertheless, those are our novels. These cold, oft-repeated adventures make us droop, and the extravagant miracles disgust us."

From Paris, the 6th of the
Moon of Shalval, 1719.

LETTER CXXXVIII

Rica to Ibben in Smyrna

Ministers succeed and destroy each other here as do the seasons. In three months, I have seen the financial system changed four times.[306] At the present day, taxes in Turkey and Persia are levied just as the founder of these empires first levied them. This is far from true here. It's true that we don't rack our brains so much about it as Westerners do. We believe that there is no more difference between administering the revenues of a prince and those of an individual citizen than between counting out a hundred thousand tomans and counting out a hundred. But here there is more sense of mystery and finesse. Great and

genial minds must work day and night, must give birth endlessly and painfully to new projects, must listen to the opinions of a multitude of people who work for them without being asked, must finally withdraw and live in the bowels of an office impenetrable to the mighty and sacred to the little people, must always have their heads filled with important secrets, miraculous plans, new systems, and while absorbed in these meditations, must be deprived of the use of speech and sometimes even of civility.

As soon as the late king had closed his eyes, there was talk of establishing a new administration. People felt they were in bad shape, but they didn't know how to go about feeling better. They hadn't fared so well under the unlimited authority of the former ministers; they wanted to divide the authority. With this in mind, six or seven councils were created, and this ministry is perhaps that one which, of them all, governed France with the most common sense.[307] Its duration was short, as were the benefits it produced.

France, at the death of the late king, was a body beset with a thousand ills. N——[308] took sword in hand, cut away the useless flesh, and applied some timely remedies. But there still remained an interior vice to be cured. A foreigner came along to undertake that cure. After several violent remedies, he thought he had restored her plumpness, but he had only bloated her.

All the people who were rich six months ago are now in poverty, and those who didn't even have bread are bursting with wealth. Never have these two extremes touched so closely. The foreigner reversed the state the way a ragpicker turns a piece of clothing inside out, making the inside appear to be the outside and putting what was underneath, on top. What unhoped-for fortunes, unbelievable even to those who made them! God does not more rapidly draw men from the void. How many lackeys served by their comrades, and perhaps tomorrow, by their masters!

All of this often produces strange things. Lackeys who made a fortune under the past reign now brag of their birth. They heap on those who have just dropped their livery in a certain street,[309] all the scorn they had for them six months ago. They shriek with all their strength:

"Nobility is ruined! What disorder in the State! What confusion in rank! Only nobodies are making a fortune!" I can promise you that these latter fellows will take their revenge on those who come after them and that in thirty years these gentlemen of quality will make a lot of noise.[310]

From Paris, the 1st of the Moon of Zilcade, 1720.

LETTER CXXXIX

Rica to the same

Here is a great example of conjugal tenderness, not only in a woman but in a queen. The Queen of Sweden, desiring at all costs to associate her husband, the Prince, to the crown, in order to remove all difficulties has sent a declaration to the assembly in which she desists from the regency in case of his election.[311]

It was some sixty years ago that another queen, named Christina, abdicated the crown to devote herself entirely to philosophy.[312] I don't know which of these examples we should admire more.

Although I rather approve of everyone's holding firm to the position nature has given him, and although I cannot praise the weakness of those who, finding themselves below their station, leave it as by a sort of desertion, still I am sometimes struck by the great souls of these two princesses, moved at seeing the mind of one and the heart of the other superior to fortune. Christina thought of learning at a time when others thought only of enjoying themselves, and the other princess seeks to find contentment only by putting her whole happiness in the hands of her august spouse.

From Paris, the 27th of the Moon of Maharram, 1720.

LETTER CXL

Rica to Usbek in ——

The *Parlement* of Paris has just been consigned to a little city called Pontoise. The Council sent it a dishonoring

declaration to be recorded or approved, and the *Parlement* recorded it in a way dishonoring to the Council.[313]

Several *parlements* in the realm are threatened with similar treatment.

These groups are always odious. They approach a king only to tell him some sad bit of truth, while a crowd of courtiers incessantly shows him a people happy with his government. These *parlements* come and give the lie to such flattery and carry to the foot of the throne the sighs and tears with which they are entrusted.

Truth, my dear Usbek, is a heavy burden when it must be carried all the way to princes. Princes ought readily to gather that those who bring themselves to be truthful are forced to do so, and that they would never decide to take such sad steps, so distressing to those who make them, were they not forced to do so out of duty, respect, and even love.[314]

From Paris, the 21st of the
Moon of Gemmadi I, 1720.

LETTER CXLI

Rica to the same

I shall come to see you toward the end of the week. How pleasantly the days will pass in your company!

I was introduced some days ago to a lady of the court who showed some desire to see my foreign face. I found her beautiful, worthy of being looked upon by our monarch, and deserving a high position in the sacred place of his heart's repose.

She put a thousand questions to me on the customs of Persian men and the way of life of Persian women. I felt that harem life was not to her taste, and she seemed to find the idea of a man shared among ten or twelve women repugnant. She could not survey the happiness of the first group without envy, or the lot of the others without pity. Since she likes to read—particularly poets and novels—she wanted me to talk of ours. What I told her about them doubled her curiosity. She begged me to make a translation of fragments of some I had brought along

with me. This I did, and several days later I sent her a Persian tale. Maybe you will be glad to see it travestied.

In the days of Sheik Ali Khan,[315] there lived in Persia a woman named Zuleima. She knew by heart the whole of the sacred Koran; there was no dervish who understood better than she the traditions of the holy prophets; Arab doctors had never said anything so mysterious but she understood its meaning completely. To so much knowledge she joined a certain character of lively wit, which made it almost impossible to know whether she sought to amuse those whom she addressed or to instruct them.

One day when she was with her companions in one of the seraglio rooms, one of them asked her what she thought of the life hereafter and if she had faith in that old tradition of our doctors to the effect that paradise was made only for men.[316]

"It is the common feeling," she told them. "There is nothing they leave undone to degrade our sex. There is even scattered throughout Persia, a tribe, called the Jewish nation, that maintains on the authority of its sacred scriptures, that we have no soul at all.

"These injurious notions have no other origin than the pride of men, who like to elevate their superiority even above the limits of their lives, and who cannot believe that on the Great Day, all creatures will appear as naught before God, without any other prerogatives save those based on virtue.

"God shall not limit himself in his rewards. Just as men who have lived well and used well their dominion over us here below will be in a paradise filled with such celestial and ravishing beauties that if a mortal were to see them, he would kill himself immediately in his impatience to enjoy them, so, too, will virtuous women go to a place of delights, with divine men assigned to their pleasure. Each of them will have a seraglio in which the men will be shut up, and eunuchs even more trustworthy than ours to guard them.

"I have read," she continued, "in an Arabic book, that a man named Ibrahim was jealous to the point of being impossible. He had twelve extremely beautiful women, whom he treated very harshly. No longer trusting either

eunuchs or walls, he kept them almost always under lock and key in their own rooms, where they could neither see nor talk to one another, for he was even jealous of innocent friendship. All his actions took on the coloring of his natural brutality; never did a gentle word leave his mouth, and never did he make the slightest gesture without adding something more to the rigors of their slavery.

"One day, when he had called them all together in a room of his seraglio, one of them, more daring than the others, reproached him for his bad character. 'When a man looks so hard for ways of making himself feared,' she said to him, 'he always manages to fall first and foremost upon ways of making himself hated. We are so unhappy that we cannot help desiring a change. Other women, in my place, would wish for your death; I wish only for my own, and even if I can hope to be separated from you only by that, it will still be sweet to me to be so separated.'

"This speech, which should have touched him, made him burst into furious anger. He drew his dagger, and plunged it into her breast. 'My dear companions,' she said in a dying voice, 'if heaven takes pity on my virtue, you will be avenged.' With those words, she left this unhappy life to enter into the sojourn of delight, where women who have lived well revel in ever-renewed happiness.

"First, she saw a smiling meadow whose verdancy was heightened by the colors of most brilliant flowers; a stream whose waters were purer than crystal rambled through it with many turnings. Next she went into charming groves, the silence of which was interrupted only by the sweet song of birds. Magnificent gardens came next; nature had decorated them with all its simplicity and magnificence. Finally she came upon a superb palace, prepared for her and filled with celestial men destined to her pleasures.

"Two of them came up immediately to undress her. Others put her into her bath and perfumed her with delicious essences. She was then given clothing infinitely richer than her own. After this, they led her into a great room, where she found a fire made with incensed wood and a table covered with the most exquisite food. Everything seemed to conspire to delight her senses. On one

side, she heard music as divine as it was sweet. On the other, she could see only the dancing of these divine men, bent solely on her pleasure. And yet so many pleasures were calculated only to lead her bit by bit to even greater pleasures. They led her to her room, and having again undressed her, carried her to a superb bed, where two men of charming beauty took her in their arms. It was then that she was intoxicated and that her delight outstripped her desires. 'I am beside myself,' she told them, 'and, if I were not sure of my immortality, I should believe I am about to die. This is too much! Leave me; I am melting under the ardor of pleasure. Yes, you restore a bit of calm to my senses. I am beginning to breathe and come back to myself. Why have they taken away the torches? Why can I no longer behold your divine beauty? Why can I not see . . . But why see? You are bringing me back to those first transports. O God! how lovely are these shadows! What! I am to be immortal, and immortal with you! I shall be. . . . No, I beg for mercy, for I can see that you are the kind never to give up!'

"After several more commands, she was obeyed, but only when she showed very seriously that she wanted to be. She rested languidly and fell asleep in their arms. Two moments of sleep cured her lassitude. She received two kisses, which suddenly inflamed her and made her open her eyes. 'I am uneasy,' she said. 'I'm afraid you don't love me any more.' In this doubt she was not willing to remain long, and so she had from them all the clarifications she could wish. 'I am undeceived,' she cried. 'Pardon, pardon. I am sure of you now. You don't say anything, but you prove it better than anything you might say. Yes, yes! I confess to you. No one has ever loved so well. But see here! Are the two of you outdoing each other at convincing me? Ah, if you outdo each other, if you add personal ambition to the pleasure of my downfall, then I am lost. You will both be conquerors, and I shall be the only conquest; but I shall sell you that victory dearly.'

"All of this came to an end only with daylight. Her faithful and lovable servants came into her room and made the two young men get up, and they were led by two old men into the quarters where they were kept for her pleasure. Then she got up and made an appearance

in that adoring court, at first under the charms of a simple wrapper, and later covered with most sumptuous finery. That night had enhanced her beauty; it had given life to her complexion and to the expression of her charms. All day long there was nothing but dancing, concerts, banquets, games, strolls, and it was seen that from time to time Anaïs stole away and flew to her two young heroes. After several precious moments' interview, she came back to the band she had left, her face ever more serene. Finally, toward evening, the band lost her altogether. She went and shut herself up in the seraglio, where she wanted, she said, to get acquainted with those immortal captives who were to live with her forever. She visited the quarters of this most hidden and charming place, and counted fifty slaves of miraculous beauty. She wandered all night from room to room, everywhere receiving homage—ever different and yet ever the same.

"And this is how the immortal Anaïs passed her days —now in brilliant pleasures, now in solitary pleasures—admired by a sparkling band of friends, or loved by a frenzied lover. Often she would leave an enchanted palace to go into a pastoral grotto. Flowers seemed to come to life under her feet, and frolics crowded before her.

"She had been in that happy abode over a week and ever beside herself with joy, had not taken the time to make a single reflection on it all. She had enjoyed happiness without knowing it, without having had a single one of those calm moments in which the soul makes an accounting, so to speak, and gives ear to itself in the silence of passion.

"The blessed have pleasures so lively that they can rarely enjoy this freedom of thought. That is why, attached as they uncontrollably are to present objects, they lose utterly any memory of things past and have no longer any care for what they knew or loved in their other life.

"But Anaïs, whose mind was truly philosophic, had passed almost her whole life in meditation. She had developed her reflections much further than one would suspect of a woman left to herself. The austere retreat in which her husband had made her live had left her that sole advantage.

"It was that force of mind that had made her scorn both the fear that obsessed her companions, and death,

which was to signal the end of her troubles and the beginning of her felicity.

"Thus she abandoned, bit by bit, the intoxication of her pleasures and shut herself up, alone, in an apartment of her palace. She allowed herself to proceed to very sweet reflections on her past lot and her present felicity. She could not keep from sympathizing with the unhappiness of her erstwhile companions: one is sensitive to torments shared with others. Anaïs did not limit herself to a simple expression of compassion. Ever more tender in her feelings toward those unfortunate women, she felt drawn to come to their help.

"She gave the order to one of the young men near her to take on the likeness of her husband, to go into the seraglio, to make himself master there, to expel the other man, and to remain in his place until she recalled him.

"The execution of her order was prompt. He clove the atmosphere, came to the door of Ibrahim's harem while Ibrahim was not there. He knocks; all doors are opened to him; the eunuchs fall at his feet. He flies to the apartments where Ibrahim's wives were locked up. While passing by, he had taken the keys out of the pockets of the jealous man, to whom he was invisible. He enters and surprises the women, at first by his gentle and affable manner, and soon thereafter, surprises them even more by his eagerness and the rapidity of his enterprises. All the women partook of this astonishment; they would have taken him for a dream if he had manifested less reality.

"While these novel scenes were being played in the harem, Ibrahim knocks, announces himself, storms and shouts. After much difficulty, he enters and throws the eunuchs into complete disorder. He strides through the house, but he retreats, and so to speak, falls from the clouds when he sees the false Ibrahim, his own true image, ensconced in all the liberties of the master. He cries for help; he wants the eunuchs to help him kill the impostor, but he is not obeyed. He has only one very weak resource—that is to fall back on the verdict of his wives. In one hour, the false Ibrahim had seduced all his judges. The other Ibrahim is pushed and dragged out of the seraglio and would have died a thousand deaths if his rival had not ordered that his life be saved. Finally,

the new Ibrahim, master of the field of battle, proved himself more and more worthy of such a choice and distinguished himself by miracles heretofore unknown.

" 'You don't look like Ibrahim,' said the women.

" 'Say, say rather that the impostor does not look like me,' corrected the triumphant Ibrahim. 'What must a man do to be your husband if what I am doing is not enough?'

" 'Ah, we are not about to doubt it,' said the women. 'If you are not Ibrahim, it is enough for us that you have so well deserved to be. You are more Ibrahim in one day than he has been in ten whole years.'

" 'So you promise,' he continued, 'that you will declare in my favor against that impostor?'

" 'Have no doubt of it,' they said with one voice, 'we swear eternal fidelity to you. We have been too long abused. The traitor has not even sensed our virtue; he sensed only his own weakness. We can clearly see that men are not made like him; it's you, most likely, they resemble. If you knew how much you make us hate him!'

" 'Ah, then I shall give you new causes for hatred,' said the false Ibrahim, 'you are not yet aware of all the wrong he did you.'

" 'We judge his injustice by the magnitude of your vengeance,' they said.

" 'Yes, you are right,' agreed the divine man, 'I have fit the punishment to the crime; I am very happy that you are satisfied with my method of punishment.'

" 'But,' said the women, 'if that impostor comes back, what shall we do?'

" 'It would, I think, be difficult for him to deceive you,' he replied. 'In the position I occupy with you, a man can't keep going by ruse, and in any case, I shall send him so far away that you will never hear him spoken of again. From now on I shall take upon myself the burden of your happiness. I shall not be jealous. I shall be able to trust you without embarrassing you. I have a good enough opinion of my worth to think you will be faithful to me. If you were not virtuous with me, with whom could you be?'

"This conversation lasted for a long time between him and the women, who, more struck by the difference between the two Ibrahims than by any resemblance, never

dreamed of insisting upon the clarification of so many marvels. Finally the desperate husband returned to bother them again. He found his whole house in joy and his wives more incredulous than ever. The stronghold was impossible for a jealous man to hold. He left in a fury, and a moment later the false Ibrahim followed him, seized him, transported him through the air, and abandoned him two thousand * leagues away.

"O ye gods! In what desperation did these women live during the absence of their dear Ibrahim! Already their eunuchs had recovered their natural severity. The whole house was in tears. They imagined sometimes that all that had happened to them was but a dream. They looked at each other and recalled the most insignificant details of these strange adventures. Finally, the celestial Ibrahim came back, even more lovable. It seemed to the ladies that his trip had not been toilsome. The new master adopted a behavior so different from that of the first that it surprised all his neighbors. He got rid of all his eunuchs, opened his home to everyone; he didn't even want to let his wives wear the veil. It was a rather strange sight to see them with men at banquets, just as free as the men themselves. Ibrahim rightfully believed that the customs of the country were not made for citizens like himself. Meanwhile, he refused no expense; with immense prodigality he ran through the wealth of the jealous man, who, returning three years later from the far-off lands where he had been transported, found nothing but his wives and thirty-six children."

From Paris, the 26th of the Moon of Gemmadi,* 1720.

LETTER CXLII

Rica to Usbek in ——

Here is a letter I received yesterday from a scholar. It will strike you as unusual.

Monsieur:

Six months ago I came into the inheritance of a very rich uncle, who left me five or six hundred thousand livres and a magnificently furnished house. It is a pleas-

ure to have wealth when you know how to make good use of it. I have neither desire nor taste for pleasures. I am almost always shut up in my study, where I lead the life of a scholar. That is where a curious lover of venerated antiquity can be found.

After my uncle had closed his eyes, I should very much have liked to have him buried with the ceremonies observed by the ancient Greeks and Romans. But at that time I had no lachrymatories, no urns, no ancient lamps.

Since then, however, I have supplied myself well with these precious rarities. Several days ago I sold my silver plate to buy an earthenware lamp that had been used by a Stoic philosopher. I got rid of all the large mirrors with which my uncle had covered almost all the walls of his apartments, in order that I might have a little mirror, somewhat cracked, that was in times past used by Vergil. I am enchanted to see my face reflected in it instead of the face of the Swan of Mantua. That's not all. For a hundred gold louis, I bought five or six pieces of copper money that was in circulation two thousand years ago. I could not think of having in my house now a single piece of furniture not made before the decline of the Empire. I have a little collection of very precious and expensive manuscripts. Although I ruin my eyes reading them, I much prefer using them to printed texts, which are not as correct and which anyone can own. Although I practically never go out, I am not without an exaggerated passion for knowing all the old roads of Roman times. Very near my place there is one that a proconsul in Gaul had built about twelve hundred years ago. When I go to my country house, I never miss the chance to pass over it, although it is most uncomfortable and lengthens my journey by more than a league. But what makes me furious is the fact that they have put wooden markers from place to place to show the distance of neighboring cities. I am desolate to see these miserable markers instead of the milestones that were there before. I have no doubt that I shall have them re-established by my heirs, for I shall bind them to such expense in my will. If, sir, you are in possession of some Persian manuscript, you would do me a great favor to come to some agreement with me on it. I shall pay you whatever you want and shall give you, into the bargain, some works of my own by which you will see that I am not an idle member of the Republic of Letters. Among other things, you will notice a dissertation in which I show

that the crown used in times past in triumphal processions was oak, and not laurel. You will admire another in which I prove by learned conjectures drawn from the most serious Greek authors, that Cambyses was wounded on the left leg, and not on the right; another in which I demonstrate that a small forehead was a much sought-after beauty for the Romans. I shall also send you an in-quarto volume in the form of an explanation of a verse from the sixth book of Vergil's *Aeneid.* You will receive all this only a few days hence; as to the immediate present, I must satisfy myself with sending you this fragment of an ancient Greek mythologist—unedited until now—which I discovered in the dust of a library. I leave you now to take up an important piece of business I am involved in. It has to do which fifth century copyists have strangely corrupted. with restoring a lovely passage of Pliny the Naturalist,

I am, Sir, your . . . etc."

FRAGMENT OF AN ANCIENT MYTHOLOGIST

In an island near the Orcades, there was born a child who had for father Aeolus, the god of the winds, and for mother a nymph of Caledonia. It was said of him that he learned to count on his fingers all by himself, and that at the age of four, he distinguished so well between metals that when his mother tried to give him a brass ring instead of a gold one, he recognized the trick and threw it on the ground.

As soon as he was grown, his father taught him the secret of shutting up the winds in skins,* which he then sold to all travelers. However, since his merchandise was not highly valued in his country, he left home and began to travel about the world in the company of the blind god of chance.

He learned in his travels that in Baetica, gold shone everywhere, and this made him hasten his steps there. He was badly received by Saturn, who was then reigning. But, that god having departed this earth, our hero took it into his head to go to all the crossroads and shout continually in a husky voice: "People of Baetica, you think you are rich because you have gold and silver. Your error arouses my pity. Believe me and leave the country of base metals. Come to the Empire of Imagination and I promise you riches that will surprise even you." There-

upon he promptly opened a great number of the skins he had brought with him and distributed his merchandise to any man who wanted some.

The following day, he came back to the same crossroads and shouted: "People of Baetica, do you want to be rich? Imagine to yourselves that I am very rich and that you are too. Each morning put it into your head that your fortune has doubled during the night. Then arise, and if you have creditors, go pay them with what you have imagined and tell them to do some imagining of their own."

He came back again several days later and spoke thus: "People of Baetica, I can see very clearly that your imagination is not as lively as it was at first. Model yourselves on mine and allow yourselves to follow it. Each morning I shall place before your eyes a signboard that will be unto you a source of riches. You will see only four words, but they will be very important, for they will determine the dowries of your wives, the portions of your children, the number of your servants. As for you," he said to those of the flock closest to him, "as for you, my dear children (and I may call you by that name, for you have received from me a second birth), my sign shall determine the splendor of your carriages, the sumptuousness of your banquets, and the number of your mistresses and their allowances."

Several days after that, he arrived at the crossroads entirely out of breath, and furious with anger, he cried: "People of Baetica, I have advised you to imagine, and I see that you are not doing so. Well then! Now I command you to do it." And thereupon he left them suddenly, but reflection called him back. "I find out that some of you are despicable to the point of keeping your gold and silver. For the silver, we'll let that pass, but for the gold . . . , for the gold . . . Ah! that makes me very indignant . . . I swear by my holy skins that if those people don't bring it to me, I shall punish them severely." Then he added with a tone of persuasion, "Do you think it is because I want to keep these miserable metals that I ask you for them? A token of my candor is that when you brought some to me a few days ago, I returned half of it to you on the spot."

The next day, he could be noticed from far off, and he was observed insinuating himself with a dulcet and flattering tone of voice: "People of Baetica, I am finding out that you have a part of your treasures in foreign countries. I beg of you, have them returned. You will be doing me a great favor, and I shall be eternally grateful to you."

The son of Aeolus was talking to people with no great desire to laugh. And yet they could not keep themselves from it—which explains why he came away very confused. However, recovering his courage, he chanced one more little prayer: "I know that you have precious stones. In the name of Jupiter, get rid of them! Nothing will make you as poor as that sort of thing. Get rid of them, I say! If you cannot do so by yourselves, I shall give you excellent businessmen. What riches will flow in your country if you do what I advise. Yes, I promise you the very purest part of what is to be found in my skins."

Finally, he climbed onto a platform, and in a more assured tone of voice, said: "People of Baetica, I have compared the happy state in which you find yourselves now with the condition I found you in when I came here. I see that you are the richest people on earth, but to crown your good fortune, allow me to take away the half of your wealth." With these words, on wings of light, the son of Aeolus disappeared, leaving his audience in inexpressible consternation. Which explains why he came back next day and spoke thus: "I noticed yesterday that my speech displeased you immensely. Well then! pretend I said nothing. It is true that half is too much. We need only take other means to arrive at the goal I have given myself. Let us bring our wealth together into the same place; we can do that easily, for it doesn't take up much room." And, immediately, three quarters of their wealth disappeared.[317]

From Paris, the 9th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1720.

LETTER CXLIII*

Rica to Nathanael Levi, Jewish physician, in Leghorn

You ask me what I think of the value of amulets and the power of talismans. Why do you turn to me? You are a

Jew and I am a Moslem—which is to say, we are both quite credulous.

I always carry on my person over two thousand passages of the Holy Koran. I tie to my arms a little package in which are written the names of more than two hundred dervishes; the names of Ali, Fatima, and all the Pure Ones are hidden in more than twenty places in my clothing.[318]

And yet I cannot disapprove of those who reject the efficacy attributed to certain words; it is much more difficult for us to refute their rationalizations than it is for them to refute our experiences.

I carry all these holy rags about through long habit, in order to conform to general practice. I believe that if they possess no more virtue than rings and other jewelry with which people adorn themselves, they have no whit less. But you, you place all your trust on a few mysterious letters, and without that precaution, you would live in constant fright.

Men are certainly to be pitied! They float continually between false hopes and ridiculous fears, and instead of leaning upon reason, they invent for themselves monsters to terrify them, or phantoms to seduce them.

What can you hope to produce by the arrangement of certain letters? And what effect do you think their rearrangement can upset? What relation do these letters have with winds that they should calm storms, or with gunpowder that they should overcome its power, or with what doctors call the "peccant humor" or the "morbific cause" * of sickness that they should cure it?

What is so extraordinary is that those who tire out their reason to make it conclude certain events from occult powers must needs make no less effort to prevent themselves from seeing the true cause behind those events.

You will say that certain magic spells have caused a battle to be won. And I shall reply that you must be very blind indeed not to find sufficient reasons for that effect (whose cause you prefer not to know) in the location of the terrain, the number and courage of the soldiers, and the experience of the officers.

I shall grant you for the moment the existence of magic spells. But you, for a moment in your turn, grant me the possibility that they do not exist, for that is not impos-

sible. What you are granting does not prevent two armies from fighting. Do you want me to believe that, in this particular instance, neither one of them will carry off the victory?

Do you think that their fate will remain uncertain until some invisible power comes to determine it? Do you believe that all the blows of battle will be lost, all precautions taken in vain, and all courage useless?

Upon such occasions, do you think that death, a very present danger in a thousand ways, is incapable of producing in men's minds those terrors of panic you find it so hard to explain? Do you suppose that in an army of a hundred thousand men there could not be a single timid man? Do you believe that this single man's disheartening cannot produce loss of courage in another? And that the second man, upon leaving a third man in the lurch, will not soon encourage him to do the same to a fourth? Nothing more is needed to have despair of victory suddenly seize a whole army, and seize upon it the more easily, the more numerous its ranks.

Everyone knows and feels that men, like all creatures who tend to preserve their being, love life passionately. This everyone knows in general, and yet, in certain given circumstances, men try to find out why they were afraid of losing it!

Although holy books of all nations are filled with these frenzied and supernatural terrors, I can imagine nothing so pointless, because in order to be sure that an effect, capable of being produced by a hundred thousand causes, is supernatural, one would first have to examine whether any one of these causes had not operated—and that is impossible.

I shall say no more, Nathanael; I feel that the subject does not deserve such serious treatment.

From Paris, the 20th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1720.

P.S. As I was finishing this letter, I heard advertised in the streets a letter from a provincial doctor to a Parisian doctor (for here even bagatelles get printed, published, and purchased). I thought it might be good to send it along to you because it touches upon our subject.*

LETTER FROM A PROVINCIAL DOCTOR
TO A PARISIAN DOCTOR

There was in our city a sick man who had not slept at all for thirty-five days. His doctor prescribed opium, but the man could not bring himself to take it. He would have the cup right up to his lips and be more undecided than ever. Finally, he said to his doctor: "Sir, I ask your indulgence only until tomorrow; I know a man who does not practice medicine but who has at his place a countless number of remedies for insomnia. Let me send someone now for him, and if I don't sleep tonight, I promise to come back to you." The doctor was dismissed and the sick man had the curtains drawn and said to a little lackey: "Look here, go to M. Anis and ask him to come talk to me." M. Anis arrives. "My dear Monsieur Anis, I am wasting away; I cannot sleep. Would you have in your shop *The C. of G.*[319] or some other text of religious devotion written by a R.J.F.[320] which you haven't been able to sell? * For often the remedies kept longest are the best."

"Sir," replied the bookseller, "I have in the shop *The Holy Court*, in six volumes, by Father Caussin; at your disposal. I'll send it to you, and I hope you find great benefit in it. If you want the works of the Reverend Father Rodriguez,[321] Spanish Jesuit, do not hesitate. But, take my advice, let's stay with Father Caussin, and I hope that, with God's help, a paragraph of Father Caussin will do you as much good as a complete leaf of *The C. of G.*" Thereupon Monsieur Anis left and hurried to look for the remedy in his shop. *The Holy Court* arrives; they shake off the dust, and the sick man's son, a young student, begins to read. He was the first to feel the effect; with the second page he started pronouncing with a badly articulated voice, and already the whole company felt themselves weakening. A second later, everyone was snoring, except the sick man, who after having long been put to the test, finally fell off.

Early the next day, the doctor arrives. "Well! did you take my opium?" No one answers him. The wife, daughter, and little boy of the sick man, carried away with joy, show him Father Caussin. He asks what that is.

They reply: "Long live Father Caussin! We must send him off to be bound. Who would have thought it?

Who would have believed it? It is a miracle. Here, sir, here is Father Caussin; it's this volume that put my father to sleep." And thereupon they explained the whole event as it had happened.* 322

LETTER CXLIV*

Rica to Usbek

Several days ago, in a country house where I was staying, I came upon two scholars who enjoy a wide reputation here. Their character struck me as admirable. The conversation of the first, when properly weighed, came down to this: "What I said is true because I said it." The conversation of the second dealt with other matters: "What I did not say is not true because I didn't say it."

I rather liked the first man: that a man should be opinionated doesn't bother me at all; but that he should be impertinent, that does bother me, and a lot. The first man defends his own ideas; they are his own wealth. The second attacks the opinion of others, and that constitutes the wealth of everyone.

Oh, my dear Usbek, how badly vanity serves men who have a stronger dose of it than they need for the preservation of nature. Those fellows seek to be admired by dint of displeasing. They strive to be superior; they are not even equal.

Come, modest men, and let me embrace you. You are the charm and sweetness of life. You think you possess nothing, and I am telling you that you have everything. You think that you humble nobody, and you humble everybody. When I compare you in my mind to those absolute men I see on all sides, I cast them down from their tribunals and place them at your feet.

From Paris, the 22nd of the
Moon of Shahban, 1720.

LETTER CXLV*

Usbek to ——

A witty man is usually difficult in social intercourse. He chooses few people; he is bored with that great number

of people he is pleased to call dull company; it is impossible for him not to make his disgust somewhat felt—and accordingly, to make enemies.

Certain to be liked when he chooses, he often neglects to choose.

He tends to criticize, for he notices more things than another and is much more sensitive to them.

He almost always destroys his own chances, for his mind furnishes him with a greater number of ways to do so.

He fails in his undertakings because he ventures to do so much. His vision, which always carries far, makes him see objects at too great a remove. And that, without mentioning that in the initiation of a project, he is struck less by the difficulties arising from the matter than by the remedies that are his own, drawn from his own resources.

He neglects the minor details upon which, all the same, the success of most great ventures depends.

Your mediocre man, on the other hand, seeks to turn everything to his own account; he senses that he has nothing to lose in carelessness.

Ordinarily, general approval goes to the mediocre man. People are charmed to grant things to him, and delighted to take them away from the other. Whereas envy pounces on the witty man, and people forgive him nothing, they make up for all the deficiencies of the mediocre. Vanity speaks up for him.

But if a witty man suffers so many drawbacks, what are we to say of the harsh lot of scholars?

I never think of it* without recalling a letter from one of them to one of his friends. Here it is:

Monsieur,

I am a man who, every night, busies himself with observing through thirty-foot glasses, those great bodies rolling over our heads. When I want to relax, I take my little microscope and examine a flesh worm or a mite.

I am far from rich and I have only one room. I don't even dare make a fire in it because that's where I keep my thermometer and any extraneous heat would make it rise. Last winter I thought I should die of the cold, and although my thermometer, touching its lowest degree, warned me that my hands were about to freeze,

I did not interrupt what I was doing. I have the consolation of having exact information on the most sensitive changes of weather during the whole past year.

I am very rarely in communication with others, and out of all the people I see, I don't know a single one. However, there is a man in Stockholm, another in Leipzig, and one in London with whom I keep up such an exacting correspondence that I let no post go by without writing them.

Yet, although I know no one in my neighborhood, I have such a bad reputation there that I shall in the end be forced to leave. Five years ago I was crudely insulted by one of my neighbors for having dissected a dog she claimed belonged to her. A butcher's wife, who was nearby, got into the argument, and while the first woman covered me with insults, this one used stones to attack me, along with Dr. ——, who was with me and who caught a terrible blow on the frontal and occipital bone, as a consequence of which his seat of reasoning was quite shaken up.

Since that time, as soon as any dog strays from the end of the street, it is immediately decided that he has fallen victim to me. One good burgher's wife, who had lost a little one that, she said, she loved more than her children, came and fainted in my room the other day, and when she didn't find her dog, summoned me to appear before the magistrate. I think I shall never be free from the importunate malice of these women, who with their yapping voices, continually keep me dizzy with their funeral orations for all the automata that have died these past ten years.

I am, Sir, your . . . etc.

In time past all scholars were accused of black magic. I am not a bit surprised by this. Each man would say to himself: "I have developed my natural talents of study as far as they can go. And yet a certain scholar holds advantages over me; therefore, there must be something diabolic in this business."

Now that such accusations have fallen into discredit, another tack has been taken, and a scholar can scarcely avoid the reproach of irreligion or heresy.[323] It does him no good to be absolved by the people; the wound is still there and will never close. For him this will always be a sore spot. An adversary will come along thirty years after and say modestly: "God forbid I should say that what you

are accused of is true, but you *were* obliged to justify yourself." And thus a scholar's very justification is turned against him.

If he writes some story and is noble in mind and upright in heart, people will think up a thousand persecutions. They will go arouse the magistrate against him about an event that happened a thousand years ago. They will require that his pen be captive if it refuses to be venal.

Happier are those cowardly men who abandon their faith for a mediocre annuity, who if you took all their impostures one by one, would be selling them at less than an obol each, who overthrow the constitution of the empire, lessen the rights of one power and increase those of another—giving to princes, taking away from the people, resuscitating superannuated laws, flattering the passions that are in style in their era, and the vices that exist on the throne, imposing all the more unworthily on posterity as posterity has less and less means for destroying their testimony.*

But it is not enough for an author to have suffered all these insults, not enough for him to have remained in continued uneasiness over the success of his work. Finally, that work, which has cost him so much effort, sees the light of day. It draws quarrels down upon his head from every quarter. And how can he avoid them? He had a certain feeling on a matter; he upheld it in his writings. Little did he know that a man two hundred leagues away had said exactly the opposite. Nevertheless, here begins the declaration of war.

If only, at least, he could hope to receive some little consideration! No. At best, he can hope for some esteem only from those who are devoted to the same branch of science as he. A philosopher holds sovereign scorn for a man whose head is loaded with facts. He is himself considered a dreamer by the man who has a good memory.

As to those who proudly profess their ignorance, they would like the whole human race to be buried in that oblivion in which they themselves will be buried.

A man who lacks some talent compensates for his lack by scorn. He removes the obstacle that stood between himself and recognition of merit, and thereby he finds himself on a par with the fellow whose works he fears so strongly.

In conclusion, to a doubtful reputation, must be joined privation of pleasure, and loss of health.

From Paris, the 26th of the Moon of Shahban, 1720.*

LETTER CXLVI

Usbek to Rhedi in Venice

For a long time now it has been said that good faith is the very soul of a good ministry.

An individual can enjoy fully the obscurity of his position; he can lose face only with a few people. He dissimulates before others. But a minister who lacks integrity has as many witnesses and judges as there are people governed by him.

Shall I dare say it straight? The greatest evil committed by a minister without integrity[324] is not serving his prince badly and ruining his people. There is another ill a thousandfold more dangerous to my mind, and that is the bad example he gives.

You know that I have traveled a long time in the Indies. I have seen a nation, noble by nature, perverted in the flashing of an eye, from the lowliest of her subjects right up to the greatest, and by the bad example of a minister. I have seen a whole nation in which magnanimity, integrity, candor, and good faith have from all time been regarded as inborn virtues, become in an instant the basest of nations. And I have watched the disease spread, even to its healthiest members. I have seen the most virtuous of men do shameful things and violate* the prime principles of justice on the vain pretext that they had been first violated to their detriment by others.

They called forth odious laws as guaranty of the most cowardly actions and gave to injustice and perfidy the name of *necessity*.

I have seen faith in contracts abandoned, the most sacred conventions destroyed, all family law overthrown. I have seen greedy debtors—proud with the insolence of poverty, contemptible tools of the madness of laws and the rigor of the times—counterfeit a payment rather than

pay it, and direct a knife to the breasts of their benefactors.

I have seen others, still more shameful, buy for practically nothing, or rather, gather from the ground oak leaves and substitute them for the subsistence of widows and orphans.[325]

I have observed an insatiable thirst for wealth suddenly spring to life in every heart. In a trice I have watched the formation of a detestable conspiracy to get rich—not by honest work and noble industry, but through the ruination of the prince and of the state and its citizens.

I have seen an honest citizen go to bed during these unfortunate times, only after saying: "I have ruined one family today; tomorrow I shall ruin another."

"I am going off now," said another, "with a black man carrying an inkhorn in his hand and a sharpened blade behind his ear, and kill all those to whom I am in debt."

Another would say: "I can see that I am settling my affairs. It is true that three days ago when I went to make a certain payment, I left a whole family in tears, wiped out the dowry of two fine girls, and deprived a little boy of his education. The father will die of grief, the mother is perishing from sadness. Still I did no more than is permitted under the law."

What greater crime is there than the one a minister commits when he corrupts the morals of a whole nation, debases the most noble souls, tarnishes the splendor of high office, obscures virtue itself, and confounds the highest birth with universal scorn?

What will posterity say when forced to blush at the shame of its fathers? What will a young generation say when it compares its ancestors' steel with the gold of those to whom they directly owe the light of day? I have no doubt but that nobles will slice off from their armorial quarterings an undeserved degree of nobility, which does them dishonor, and will leave the present generation in the frightful void where it has put itself.[326]

From Paris, the 11th of the
Moon of Ramadan, 1720.*

LETTER CXLVII

The grand eunuch to Usbek in Paris

Things have come to a pass that is no longer tolerable. Your wives have imagined that your departure gave them complete impunity. Horrible things are taking place. I tremble myself at the cruel tale I am about to tell you.

Zelis, having gone off to the mosque several days ago, let her veil fall and stood practically barefaced before the whole crowd.

I found Zachi in bed with one of her women slaves—a thing so strongly prohibited by the laws of the seraglio.

By the greatest stroke of chance in the world, I fell upon a letter, which I am sending you. I have never been able to find out to whom it was addressed.

Last evening, a young lad was found in the garden of the seraglio, and he escaped over the walls.

Add to that all that has not come to my attention, for without any doubt you are betrayed. I await your orders, and until the happy moment when I receive them, I shall remain in a mortally grievous state. However, if you do not place all these women under my discretion, I shall be responsible to you for none of them, and daily I shall have news every bit as sad to send you.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 1st of the Moon of Rhegeb, 1717.

LETTER CXLVIII

Usbek to the first eunuch in the seraglio of Ispahan

Receive with this letter unlimited power over the entire seraglio. Command with the same authority as myself. May fear and terror walk with you; run from apartment to apartment bearing punishment and correction. May the whole seraglio live in consternation. May everyone melt in tears at your approach. Question the whole seraglio; start with the slaves. Do not spare my love; let everything undergo your fearsome jurisdiction. Bring out into the light of day the most hidden secrets. Purify that infamous spot, and cause exiled virtue to return. For, from

this moment hence, I place on your head the least infraction that may be committed. I suspect Zelis of being the one to whom the letter you intercepted was addressed. Look into this matter with the eyes of a lynx.

From ——, the 11th of the Moon of Zilhage, 1718.

LETTER CXLIX

Narsit to Usbek in Paris

The grand eunuch has just died, O magnificent lord. Since I am the oldest of your slaves, I have taken his place until you have made manifest upon whom you deign to cast your eyes.

Two days after his death, one of your letters addressed to him was brought to me. I was very careful not to open it. I have enveloped it with respect and locked it away until you have made your holy will known to me.

Yesterday a slave came in the middle of the night to tell me he had found a young man in the seraglio. I arose, looked into the matter, and concluded that it was a vision.

I kiss thy feet, sublime lord, and beg thee to count upon my devotion, my experience, and my old age.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 5th of the Moon of Gemmadi I, 1718.

LETTER CL

Usbek to Narsit in the seraglio of Ispahan

Miserable wretch that you are! You have in your hands letters containing prompt and violent orders. Your least delay can unleash madness in me, yet you remain calm on some empty pretext!

Horrible things are going on; perhaps half of my slaves deserve to die. I send you herewith the letter that the first eunuch wrote on this matter before he died. If you had opened the package addressed to him, you would have found bloody orders in it. So read them, those orders; you will perish if you do not carry them out.

From ——, the 25th of the Moon of Shalval, 1718.

LETTER CLI

Solim to Usbek in Paris

If I were to keep silent any longer, I should be as guilty as all those criminals you have in your seraglio.

I was the confidant of the grand eunuch, the most faithful of your slaves. When he saw his death approaching, he had me called, and he spoke these words to me: "I lie here dying, yet the only grief I feel upon leaving this life is that my last glances have found my master's wives criminal. May heaven preserve him from all the sorrows I foresee! May my threatening shade, after my death, come to remind these traitorous women of their duty and continue to intimidate them! Here are the keys of these dread precincts. Go and carry them to the oldest of the blacks. If, however, after my death, he is lacking in vigilance, be mindful to warn your master." Having finished those words, he expired in my arms.

I know* what he wrote you, some time before his death, touching upon the behavior of your wives. There is a letter in the seraglio which would have brought terror along with it had it been opened. The letter you wrote after that was intercepted three leagues from here. I don't know what's going on; everything is turning for the worse.

Meanwhile your wives no longer show any reserve; since the death of the grand eunuch, everything seems permissible to them. Roxane alone has remained in the path of duty and preserves some discretion. Each day sees further corruption of morals. No longer is there to be found on the countenance of your wives that strict, vigorous virtue which was in times past enthroned there. A new sense of joyfulness, spread throughout these halls, is, to my mind, infallible proof of some new satisfaction. In the most minute things, I notice liberties unknown up to now. Even among your slaves there reigns a certain indolence toward duty and observation of rules which surprises me; they no longer possess that ardent zeal to serve you which once seemed to quicken the whole seraglio.

Your wives have spent a week in the country, in one of your most isolated houses. It is said that the slave

charged with their care was won over, and that a day before their arrival he had caused two men to be hidden in a stone alcove in the walls of the main bedchamber, whence they issued forth each evening after we had retired. The old eunuch who is now our chief is an imbecile who can be brought to believe anything you want him to believe.

I am aroused by vengeful anger against so many betrayals, and if heaven were to choose that you should judge me capable—the better to serve you—of commanding, I promise you that your wives would be faithful even if they were not virtuous.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 6th of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1719.

LETTER CLII

Narsit to Usbek in Paris

Roxane and Zelis wished to go to the country; I did not think I should refuse them. O happy Usbek! You do have faithful wives and vigilant slaves. I command over precincts that virtue seems to have made her abode. Be sure that nothing will happen here that your eyes could not behold.

A misfortune that causes me much distress has taken place. Some Armenian merchants, just come to Ispahan, brought with them one of your letters, addressed to me. I sent a slave to fetch it. On his return, he was robbed, and the letter is lost. So write to me without delay, for I suppose that in this change of authority you must have important words of advice for me.

From the seraglio of Fatima, the 6th of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1719.

LETTER CLIII

Usbek to Solim in the seraglio of Ispahan

I put my sword in your hand. I entrust to your keeping what is now most precious to me in all the world—my vengeance. Take up this new function; but bring to it

neither sympathy nor pity. I am writing my wives to obey you blindly. In their confusion at so many crimes, they will fall down at your very glance. I must be in your debt both for my happiness and my ease of mind. Bring back my seraglio as it was when I left, but begin by purifying it. Wipe out the guilty and cause to tremble those who were tempted to become so. What gift from your master can be beyond your hopes for such notable service! It is up to you alone to raise yourself even above your station and to receive all the rewards you have ever desired.

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1719.

LETTER CLIV

Usbek to his wives

May this letter be like unto the thunder that falls in the midst of storms and flashes of lightning! Solim is now your first eunuch—not to guard but to punish you. May the whole seraglio bend low before him! He is to judge your past actions, and for the future, he will cause you to live under a yoke so rigorous that you will look back regretfully to your freedom even if not to your virtue.

From Paris, the 4th of the
Moon of Shahban, 1719.

LETTER CLV

Usbek to Nessir in Ispahan

Happy the man who, appreciating the value of a sweet and peaceful life, reposes his heart in the bosom of his family and knows no other land than the land that gave him birth!

I am living in a barbarous climate, in the company of everything that vexes me, far removed from everything that interests me. A somber sadness seizes on me; I am falling into a frightful oppression. It seems to me that I am destroying myself and no longer find my own personality except when a dark jealousy ignites within and gives birth in my soul to fear, suspicion, hate, and regret.

You know me, Nessir. You have ever seen into my heart as I into yours. It would tear your heart if you knew my miserable state of mind. Sometimes I wait for six whole months for news of my seraglio; I count all the instants as they go by; my impatience always makes them longer. And when the moment that has been so long awaited is about to arrive, there occurs a sudden revolution in my heart; my hand trembles upon opening the fatal letter. This unrest, which brought me to utter despair, I find the happiest state I can be in, and I fear to be brought out of it by a blow more cruel for me than a thousand deaths.

But, whatever reason I had for leaving my country—although I owe my life to my withdrawal—still, Nessir, I can no longer remain in this frightful exile! Ah, and shall I not die all the same, prey as I am to my grief! I have a thousand times urged Rica to leave this foreign country, but he is opposed to all my resolves. He holds me here on a thousand pretexts. He seems to have forgotten his country, or rather, he seems to have forgotten me, so calloused has he grown to my displeasure.

Miserable man that I am! I wish to see again my country, and perhaps, only to become still more miserable! Ah! What shall I do there? I shall be carrying my head back to my enemies. And more, I shall return to my seraglio, where I must demand an accounting of the tragic period of my absence. And if I find guilty parties there, what will happen to me? If the very idea overwhelms me from afar, what will it be like when my presence makes that idea more real? What will it be like if I am forced to see and hear what I dare not even imagine without trembling? What will it be like, finally, if the punishment I myself lay down must remain the eternal mark of my shame and despair?

I shall enclose myself behind walls more terrible for me than for the women who are kept under guard there. I shall take with me into that place all my suspicions. The embraces of my wives shall relieve me no whit; in my bed, in their arms, I shall find joy only in my anxiety; in moments so ill-fitted to reflections, my jealousy will find material to keep them alive. Contemptible outcasts of human nature, you vile slaves with hearts forever closed

to all feelings of love, you would bewail your state no longer if you knew the unhappiness of my own.

From Paris, the 4th of the Moon of Shahban, 1719.

LETTER CLVI

Roxane to Usbek in Paris

Horror, darkness, and fright reign in the seraglio. A terrible mourning surrounds it. A tiger constantly exerts his full rage. He has put two white eunuchs to the torture, and they have confessed nothing but their innocence. He has sold a part of our slaves and forced us to exchange among ourselves the women who remain. Zachi and Zelis, in the dark of night, have received shocking treatment in their bedchambers. Sacrilege did not hesitate to lay base hands upon them. He keeps each of us closed up in her apartment, and although we are all alone there, he makes us live under the veil. We are no longer allowed to speak to each other, and it would be a crime for us to write to each other. The only thing remaining free to us is our tears.

A company of new eunuchs has come into the harem; they assail us day and night. Our sleeping is continually interrupted by their real or pretended suspicions. What consoles me is that all this will not last long, and that my sorrows will end with my life. That life will not be long, cruel Usbek! I shall not grant you the time to have all these outrages stopped.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 2nd of the Moon of Maharram, 1720.

LETTER CLVII*

Zachi to Usbek in Paris

O Heaven! A barbarian has injured me even in his very manner of punishing me! He inflicted upon me that chastisement which begins with shocking our modesty, that chastisement which places us in extreme humiliation, that

chastisement which, so to speak, brings us back to childhood.

My soul, at first destroyed by the shame, was regaining consciousness of itself and beginning to grow indignant, when my screams made the ceilings of my apartments resound. The others could hear me begging for mercy from the vilest of all humans, and appealing to his pity as he continued to be more inexorable.

Since that time, his insolent and servile soul has gained ascendancy over mine. His physical presence, his looks, his words—every possible misfortune seeks me out to oppress me. When I am alone I have at least the consolation of pouring forth my tears. But as soon as he comes into view, fury seizes me; yet I find that fury powerless, and I fall into despair.

The tiger dares to tell me that you are the perpetrator of all these cruelties. He would like to deprive me of my love and to desecrate the very feelings of my heart. When he pronounces the name of the man I love, I can no longer find pity for myself; I can only die.

I have lived through your absence, and I have preserved my love by the very force of that love. Nights, days, passing moments—all were for you. I was haughty in my very love, and yours made me respected here. But now . . . No! I can no longer tolerate the humiliation into which I have fallen. If I am innocent, come back and love me. Come back, if I am guilty, so that I may die at your feet.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 2nd of the Moon of Maharram, 1720.

LETTER CLVIII*

Zelis to Usbek in Paris

From a thousand leagues distance, you judge me guilty. From a thousand leagues distance, you are punishing me. A barbarous eunuch dares to lay his vile hands on me, and he acts on your orders! It is the tyrant who offends me and not the man carrying out his tyranny.

You can, at your fancy, double your cruel treatment. My heart has found calm since it is no longer able to love you. Your soul has brought its own debasement on

itself, and you are becoming cruel. Be assured that you are not happy.

Adieu.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 2nd of the Moon of Maharram, 1720.

LETTER CLIX

Solim to Usbek in Paris

I pity myself, magnificent lord, and I pity you. Never has a faithful servant fallen into the terrible despair in which I am now. Here are your misfortunes and my own; I write them to you only with much trembling.

I swear by all the prophets of heaven that since you entrusted your wives to my care, I have watched over them night and day. Never for a moment have I suspended the course of my anxiety. I started my stewardship with punishments, and I have put an end to them without leaving off my inborn austerity.

But what am I saying? Why should I now boast of a fidelity that has proved useless to you? Forget all my past services; look upon me as a traitor, and punish me for all the crimes I was unable to prevent.

Roxane, proud Roxane! O Heaven! Whom can one trust from now on! You suspected Zelis* and were completely sure of Roxane. But her savage fidelity was a cruel deception. It was the veil of her betrayal. I caught her in the arms of a young man, who attacked me as soon as he realized he was discovered. He inflicted two dagger wounds on me. The eunuchs, alerted by the noise, surrounded him. He defended himself for a long time and wounded several of them. He even wanted to go back into the bedroom, to die, he said, before Roxane's eyes. Finally, however, he had to give up to our strength of numbers, and he fell at our feet.

I do not know whether I shall await your severe orders or not, my sublime lord. You have delivered your vengeance over into my hands; I must not let it languish.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 8th of the Moon of Rebiab, 1720.

LETTER CLX*

Solim to Usbek in Paris

I have made my decision; all these disasters will cease. I am going to punish.

Already I feel a secret joy. My soul and your own shall grow calm. We are going to root out crime, and innocence shall grow pale.

O women who seem to be made only to remain unaware of all your senses and to be angered by your very desires, eternal victims of shame and modesty, why can I not have you enter into this seraglio in great crowds and watch your astonishment at the blood I shall shed there? [327]

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 8th of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1720.

LETTER CLXI

Roxane to Usbek in Paris

Yes, I have deceived you. I seduced your eunuchs. I took advantage of your jealousy, and out of your horrible harem I managed to make a place of pleasure and delight.

I am going to die; poison will soon course through my veins. For what have I to do here since the only man who held me to life is no more? I am dying, but my shade shall not fly off unaccompanied. I have just sent ahead of me those sacrilegious guardians who have spilled the loveliest blood in the world.

How could you have thought that I was naïve enough to imagine that I was put in the world only to adore your whims? That while you pampered yourself with everything, you should have the right to mortify all my desires? No! I might have lived in servitude, but I have always been free. I have rewritten your laws after the laws of nature, and my spirit has ever sustained itself in independence.

You should continue to be thankful to me for the sacrifice I have made to you, thankful that I lowered

myself to the point of seeming faithful to you, and thankful because I kept in my cowardly heart all that I should have proclaimed to the whole earth. Finally, you should be thankful that I have dared profane the name of virtue by allowing submission to your fancy to be called by that name.

You were surprised not to find in me the transports of love. If you had known me well, you would have found there all the violence of hate.

But for a long time you have had the good fortune to believe that a heart like mine was submissive to you. We were both fortunate: you thought I was deceived, and I was deceiving you.

My language, no doubt, seems new to you. Could it be that after having overwhelmed you with sorrow, I should even yet force you to admire my courage? But it is finished. The poison consumes me. My strength is leaving me. The pen falls from my hands. I feel even my hatred weaken. I am dying.

From the seraglio of Ispahan, the 8th
of the Moon of Rebiab I, 1720.

APPENDIX*

I. Fragments taken from *"My Thoughts"* [328]

The Persian Letters°

2249:III, fo. 478

When this work appeared it was not considered a serious work. It wasn't. Two or three daring indiscretions were forgiven in favor of a completely open conscience that brought criticism to bear on every subject, and a poison pen to none. Each reader testified to this for himself. He remembered only its gaiety. People used to be angered in times past just as they grow angered today. But in those days they knew better when to get angry.

Apology for *The Persian Letters*

2032:III, fo. 320

It is scarcely possible to blame *The Persian Letters* for things that, people claim, shocked religion.

Such things are never to be found linked with the idea of criticism, but rather with the idea of the unusual; never with an idea of objective censure, but rather with an idea of the extraordinary.

It was a Persian who was doing the talking, a man who was supposed to be struck by everything he saw and heard.

This being so, when he talks about religion, he should not appear any better informed than he is on other matters, matters such as the customs and manners of the nation, which he does not consider either good or bad, but simply amazing.

Just as he finds our customs unusual, so sometimes he finds extravagance in certain points of our dogma, for he knows nothing about them and can account for them and understand them only badly because he is familiar neither with what holds them together nor with the chain of which they are a part.

It is true that a certain amount of indiscretion is involved in having touched on such matters, for one is never as sure about what other people might think as he is about his own thinking.

II. Fragments of primitive material for *The Persian Letters*[329]

1609:II, fo. 462

The King of Tibet to the Congregation for Propaganda at Rome

You have sent to me here a man who has told me that his religion requires him to dress in black. You sent me another, who boasts of the fact that he is dressed in gray. They hate each other so much that although removed so many thousands of leagues from their country, they see each other only to exchange insults. Although my empire is vast in area, the two of them cannot live together here. I have told them they could split it up, and that one of them could then go to the Orient, and the other to the Occident. But they won't accept that either of them should be in a place where the other can never go. I admit that they know something about mathematics. But couldn't they manage to be just as learned without being so crazy? Since they told me it was their robes that inspired such frenzy in them, I have had them stripped of their robes and have tried to have them dress like two mandarins. Moreover, I had the notion that, since they have no intercourse with women, this gave them a harsh character. And so I decided to marry them off and to give to each of them two, etc.[330]

1610:II, fo. 462 vo.

Finally the decree has been published putting the Foreigner in the insane asylum, and all the French in the poorhouse.[331] Stocks and bank notes are reduced by half their value. With one scratch of the pen, our citizens are having thirty times a hundred millions taken away—which is to say, a sum that hardly exists in the whole world taken together, and one with which you could buy up the entire treasury of the kingdom of Persia. The whole nation is in tears. Black night and mourning cover this unfortunate kingdom. It resembles a city taken by assault or ravaged by flames. In the midst of so many troubles, only the Foreigner seems satisfied with himself and still talks of propping up his fatal system. I am living here in the Country of Despair; my eyes behold only the misfortunes that overwhelm the infidels. A wind rises up and carries away their wealth. Their false abundance disappears like some phantom.

1611:II, fo. 463
I have just this minute learned that the decree of which I spoke has been rescinded.[332] Such a change should not strike you as unusual. Here *schemes sweep out schemes just as clouds sweep clouds before them.* The order is revoked, but not the evil it has caused. The ministry has just let the people in on a confidential secret from which it will never recover.

From Paris, the 21st of the
Moon of Rebiab I, 1720.

1612:II, fo. 463
You tell me that our great monarch busies himself only with meting out inviolable justice to his subjects, saving the little people from the oppression of the great, and making the great respected by the little people. Eternal glory to that noble prince! May heaven grant that his power find no other limitation than his justice!

1613:II fo. 463
You ask me what sort of thing the Regency is. It is a succession of unsuccessful schemes and unconnected ideas; sudden spurts put into the semblance of a system; an amorphous mixture of weakness and authority; all the weight without the gravity of a ministry; a chain of command always either too stiff or too loose; now disobedience emboldened, now justifiable confidence discouraged; an unfortunate inconstancy in abandoning evil itself; a council that now is frozen, now multiplies, that is accepted by or completely lost to public acceptance, either with a deaf ear or with glorious acclaim; it is as different by reason of the people who make it up as it is by the ends they propose.

1614:II, fo. 463 vo.
There is a kind of turban which is responsible for half the stupidities committed in France.[333] The pretender to power, he who would have the hat at any price, imagines that it will cover all the evil steps he has taken to obtain it.

There is scarcely any prince who would not be honored to have it. There is no rascal who cannot claim the hope of getting it. Its purple color confuses all ranks and allies itself proudly with them all.

1613:II, fo. 464
I remember that when we arrived in France, Hadji Ibi looked upon the king scornfully when he was told that the monarch had neither wives, nor eunuchs, nor seraglio; that nobody fled when he passed by; and that when he was in the capital, most of the population could scarcely distinguish his coach from the coach of a private citizen.

1616:II, fo. 464
It was a grand spectacle to see all the Troglodytes joyous, while the Prince dissolved in tears.[334] The next day he appeared before the Troglodytes with a face that betrayed neither sadness nor joy. He seemed now intent only on taking charge of the government. But the secret care that devoured him soon put him in his tomb. And thus died the greatest king who ever governed men.

He was mourned for forty days; every man thought to have lost his father. Everyone said: "What has happened to the hope of the Troglodytes? We lose you, dear Prince! You believed you were not worthy to rule us. Heaven has made clear that we were not worthy to obey you. But we swear by your sacred shade, that since you did not want to govern us by your laws, we shall conduct ourselves by your example."

Another prince had to be elected, and there was one remarkable thing about it—of all the relatives of the late monarch, not a one sought the crown. From that family, the wisest and most just of all was chosen.

Toward the end of his reign, some people believed it necessary to establish commerce and the arts among the Troglodytes. The Nation was convoked, and that move was decided.

The King spoke thus: "You wished me to take the crown and believed me sufficiently virtuous to govern you. Heaven is my witness that since that time, the happiness of the Troglodytes has been the sole object of my solicitude. I have the great honor of knowing that my reign has not been sullied by the cowardice of a single Troglodyte. Would you now prefer riches to your virtue?"

"My lord," said one of them to him, "we are happy. We work on excellent soil. May I dare say it? It is you alone who will decide whether riches will be dangerous for your people or not. If they see that you prefer them to virtue, they will quickly accustom themselves to do the same, and in this, your taste will determine their own.

If you elevate a man into high government function, or share your intimate confidence with him, solely because of his wealth, be sure that this will be a mortal blow delivered by you to his virtue, and that bit by bit you will make as many dishonest men as there were men who took note of that cruel discrimination. You know, my lord, the foundation on which your people's virtue is built—it is education. Change that education, and the man who was not daring enough to be criminal will soon blush at being virtuous.

"We have two things to do: to deflate and bring to naught avarice, and equally, prodigality. Every man must be accountable to the state for the administration of his possessions. And may the coward who will lower himself to the point of robbing himself of an honest subsistence be punished no less severely than the man who runs through the patrimony of his children. Each citizen must be a fair dispenser of his own wealth, just as he would be of the wealth of another."

"Troglodytes," said the King, "riches will come into your land. But I declare before you that if you are not virtuous, you will be one of the most unfortunate peoples on earth. In your present condition, I have only to be more just than you—this is the mark of my royal authority, and I couldn't possibly find any more august mark. If you seek to distinguish yourselves only by your wealth (which is nothing in itself) I shall have to distinguish myself by the same methods in order not to remain in a poverty you would scorn. Thus I should have to overwhelm you with taxes, and you would use a great part of your subsistence in keeping up the pomp and glitter that would serve to make me respectable. At present I find all my wealth within myself, but then, you would have to wear yourselves out to make me rich, and these riches, of which you make so much, would give you no pleasure for they would all flow into my treasury. O Troglodytes! we can be united by a lovely tie: if you are virtuous, I shall be; if I am virtuous, you will be."

1617:II, fo. 466

The grand eunuch to Janum in ——[335]

I pray heaven that it will bring you back to these surroundings and protect you from all dangers.

Destined as you are to fill a position in the seraglio under my direction, you will some day perhaps come to

the position I occupy; it is on that you should fix your ambition.

Be mindful very early in your career to educate yourself and to draw the attention of your master upon you. Take on a serious forehead; give sober glances; speak very little. Let joy flee from your lips. Sadness becomes our profession very well. Although calm in appearance, from time to time let an uneasiness of mind show through. Do not await the wrinkles of age to make show of its vexations.

It is vain for you to adapt yourself to a cowardly complaisance. We are all hated by women, and hated with a passion. Do you think such implacable rage is the effect of the severity with which we treat them? Ah, they would easily forgive us our whims if they could pardon us for our misfortune.

Do not put too much store in overly exact honesty. There are niceties that scarcely befit any save free men. Our calling does not allow us the ability to be virtuous. Friendship, faith, oaths, respect for virtue, are victims that we must continually sacrifice. Forced to work without ceasing, to preserve our lives and turn punishment from our heads, any means to an end is justified: finesse, fraud, artifice, are the only virtues of unfortunate wretches like ourselves.

If you ever come to occupy the top position, your principal object will be to make yourself master of the seraglio. The more absolute you are, the more means at your disposal to break up factions and handle the fury of revenge. You must start by beating down courage and burying all passions in astonishment and fear. You will never succeed better than by arousing your master's jealousy. From time to time you will tell him little secrets. You will draw his attention to the lightest suspicions. You will fix it thereafterward by some new circumstances. Sometimes you will abandon him to his own resources, and for a period, let his uncertain mind wander about. Then you will make an appearance and he will be charmed to find in you a mediator between his love and his jealousy. He will ask your opinions. Depending upon whether you be tender or severe, you will create for yourself a protectress, or humiliate an enemy.

It's not that you can always, at your liking, throw suspicions on someone for some criminal intrigue; women suppressed under so many watchful eyes can scarcely with any likelihood be accused of certain crimes. But you must look for suspicions in the resources that desperate

love procures for itself when its furious imagination grasps at every object it finds. Never be afraid of saying too much; you can be daring in your pretending. During all these years I have been governing, I have learned, I have even seen, unbelievable things. My eyes have witnessed everything that rage can invent and everything that the demon of love can produce.

If you see that your master, susceptible to the yoke of love, has settled his heart on some one of his women, let up a bit in her case on your usual severity. But clamp down on her rivals, and try to make equally pleasant to her both your gentleness and your severity.

But if you see that he is fickle in his loves and treats with absolutism all the beauties he possesses, that he loves, leaves, and then starts over, that he destroys next morning the hopes of the evening before, and that whim succeeds choice and scorn succeeds whim, then, in that case, you will be in the most fortunate position you can possibly be in. You, master of all his wives, must treat them as if they were living in perpetual disgrace, and must fear nothing from a favor that is being lost even as it is being granted.

Thus, it is up to you to abet his inconstancy. It sometimes happens that some beauty will triumph and seize even the most fickle heart. Try as he will to escape, she calls him back to her constantly. Such continued returns threaten to become eternal attachment. At all costs, such new chains must be broken. Throw open the seraglio; cause floods of new rivals to come in; divert his attention to all sides; confound a superb mistress by their very numbers; and thus reduce her to continuing to bargain over what the others could no longer defend.

This policy will practically always work for you. In this way, you will wear away his heart so well, that he will feel nothing. Charms will be lost; so many delights, kept secret from the whole universe, will become even more hidden from his own eyes. Vainly will his wives, vying one with the other, try out their most fearsome moves on him. Useless for love, they will be attached to his heart only by jealousy.

You see that I am hiding nothing from you. Although I have never known that attachment called friendship, and have been wrapped up completely in myself, you nonetheless made me feel that I still had a heart, and while I was hard as bronze for all those slaves living under my sway, I took note of your advancing childhood with pleasure.

I took pains with your education. Severity, ever inseparable from instruction, made you unaware for a long time that you were dear to me. But you were, and I should say that I loved you as a father loves his son if those terms, father and son, were not better calculated to recall a frightful memory to both of us than to suggest a tender and intimate understanding.

1618:II, fo. 468 vo.

Rica to Usbek

Here is a letter that has come into my possession:

My dear Cousin,

Two men have left me one after the other. I attacked the one you knew about, but he was like a rock. My heart chafes at the insults it receives daily.

What did I not do to attract him? I have redoubled a hundredfold my usual politeness. Good Lord, I said within myself, is it possible that I, to whom so many sweet things were once wont to be said, should now have to repay them in vain.

My dear cousin, you are two years younger than I, and your charms are far superior to mine. But I beg of you not to abandon me over this resolution I have taken to leave this world. You are the confidante of so many secrets, and I am the depository of so many others! For more than thirty years now our friendship has won out over all those little misunderstandings that necessarily arise from the diversity of intrigues and the multitude of interests in any society.

I have often told you that those fops I used to like so much, I can no longer tolerate. They are so satisfied with themselves and so little satisfied with us. They put such a high price on their stupidity and the figure they cut . . . My dear cousin, rescue me from their scorn.

I am beginning to feel such an attraction to the company of the religious devout that such company is my sole consolation. I have not yet broken enough with the world to inspire confidence in them. But as I keep growing farther away from it, they grow bit by bit closer to me. What peace in this new sort of life, instead of the tumult and alarm of false society!

I am going to give myself over to them entirely, my dear cousin. I shall disclose to them the condition of a heart that accepts all the impressions given to it. It is

not in me to extinguish all my passions; I need only to control them.

One thing forms the fundamental principle of the devout life—this is the total suppression of exterior charms. For, just between you and me, although they are always much more innocent at the moment we leave them than they were when we began to use them, they nonetheless always imply a certain desire to please society which the life of devotion detests. That latter way of life would have us appear before it with all the damages of time, in order to show to what extent we scorn its passage. As for us, my dear cousin, it seems to me that we can still show ourselves just as we are. I have told you a hundred times that you were charming when you appeared to be most carelessly dressed, and that in you there was proof of much craft in not using any.

May this letter touch your heart and inspire in you resolutions that I have taken only after having long fought against them.

Adieu.

The life of religious devotion, which is a sign of strength in certain souls, is a sign of weakness in others. It is never indifferent. For if, on the one hand, it embellishes virtuous people, it can also complete the degradation of those who are not virtuous.

From Paris, the 25th of the Moon of Rebiab,[336] 1717.

1619:II, fo. 471

Usbek to Zelis

You are asking the judge for separation from me.[337] What an example you are setting for your daughter! What a subject of conversation for the whole seraglio! You are insulting me much less by showing how little love you have for me than by showing how little respect you have for yourself.

Do you think virtue costs your companions less than it costs you, and that their lives are any less burdensome? No, no doubt about that. But the struggles they suffered are unknown; the sorrows of a victory too strongly contested are secret ones, and virtue, even when it is tyrannical, appears in them under the guise of modest bearing and calm countenance.

I can readily believe that you suffer all the rigors of

continence. I count on the vigilance of my eunuchs. They had respect for your age, and they thought you mistress of your passions. But now that they are aware of the empire of passion over you, have no doubt that they will double their care to support and assist you. They will treat you as if you were still undergoing the perils of youth, and will begin all over again bending you to an education from which you have wandered so far.

Get rid of your ideas, therefore, and realize that there remains to you only my love, and your repentance. For I am not the man to let a woman I love pass into another's arms, even were I to be considered the most barbarous of all men . . .

I say no more; you know my heart, and you understand me.

From ——, the 1st of the
Moon of Zilhage, 1718.

III. Fragments from the Archives at La Brède

*Rica to Usbek in the country**

You remain in the country, and I am still in the tumult of Paris. Yesterday I was one of a numerous company. A young man was doing much talking, and since I had seen him several times before, I had already understood that he possessed great impertinence in his manners and an equal fatuousness in his conversation. This particular day, he was using his wit to dishonor fifteen or twenty persons. He was silent for a moment, which gave me the time to say: "Apparently, Sir, you don't know anybody else in this region."

"Why so?" he replied.

"I thought so," I answered, "because you seem to have no malicious things left to say about anyone at all."

"You are very right to grow angry," he replied. "I'll wager you don't know a single one of the persons I spoke of."

"No more do I know," I replied, "the people who are robbed on the highroad. I shall, however, always be angry that they should be robbed. I do not know the people of whom you have just spoken, but they all possess one very respectable quality: they are not here."

This bluntness on my part was not displeasing to the company, but it did not make our man any the wiser. He started reeling off some brutal atheism, and then, look-

ing at me fixedly, he said: "I am sure that Monsieur disapproves of what I say."

"Not at all," I replied. "What you are saying is God's business alone. There is no great harm in that. That Supreme Being, who sees an insect like yourself only because he is immeasurable, will know how to punish you. And so you arouse only my pity. But a little while back I was distressed to see you ruining so many families."

It seems to me, Usbek, that it is a good thing that there should be some people who are not mediocre, even in their corruption. They make virtue more lovable than could the most virtuous men. There are slanders that prompt me to love, and blasphemies that lift me toward the Creator in the same way as the hymns I hear sung.

From Paris, the 10th of the
Moon of Rebiab II, 1717.

*Hadji Ibbi to Jasheed, dervish of the mountain of Jaron**

O blessed Jasheed! The law of the Holy Koran was not vouchsafed to thee in vain. Thou uncoverest hidden precepts in the least words of that divine book. It seems to grow in size under the number of thy disciples. Thou multipliest subjects of obedience and endlessly addest to the commandments of him who found us weak when he hoped to find us strong.

Allow me to tell thee my thoughts.[338]

In the matter* of religion, the more insignificant the subject under dispute, the more violent it becomes. It gathers force in proportion to the pettiness of the subject. The fire lacks nourishment, but always ignites.

You know the thin subject matter of our arguments on Ali and abu-Bakr. If the followers of these two great men had not been more aroused to defend their opinions than were these two great men themselves to defend their self-interest, the Moslem religion would have been peaceful. Earth would not have troubled heaven, and heaven would not have troubled earth. What did most to embitter minds, were the insulting words that frenzy placed in the two liturgies. However, as soon as one of the parties has gone far enough to be shocked by them (although these insults are so general as to implicate no individual), natural equity and religious piety demand their removal—not wishing that insults, offensive to others, be spoken or that,

contrary to common sense, they be couched in the form of prayers.

From Paris, the last day of the
Moon of Shahban, 1720.

The desire* I have to instruct myself in the customs of this country makes me communicate with people as much as I can, and I am ever on the lookout for new acquaintances. I have discovered a wonderful secret for this, and that is to listen: for a Frenchman is a born talker. He likes to converse with everyone about his background, his talents, his carriages, his servants, his wealth, and his good fortune. He is delighted to find a patient man. He would be vexed not to have you know the story of his life, with all its episodes. Lend him your ears; he is your friend. If he can bring you to laugh, he will be infinitely grateful to you. He will be eternally grateful to you if you can remember that he has two hundred thousand aspers[339] of income property, a hunting pack, and twenty slaves. Above all, be careful to be persuaded that his profession far excels all the others. And add to that, that he excels within that profession. You will hold the key to his heart.

There are* three callings in Paris: being a pretty woman, being a witty woman, and being a prude.

That man* was much aggrieved by the injustice of those people who always want to be amused when someone tells a story, without ever taking thought for the amusement of the storyteller.

There is* scarcely any enlightenment to be drawn from Western books touching upon ancient history. There is a lacuna in primitive times which everyone has agreed must be filled. The very ruins have perished, and yet, they must be built up.

When history is missing, it is filled in with fables. It's something like what happens in poor countries, where the lightest money must necessarily be allowed to circulate. Poets become serious authors, and in their own province they are heeded just as much as the most scholarly historians.

This is not history of men; it is history of gods. The gods are changed into heroes, and times become less

crude. These heroes have only men for their children, because the children are closer in time than the fathers; at that point the time of fable ends, and history begins.[340]

It is impossible to express the degree of chaos in which historical centuries found the generation of the gods. Mythologists have formed, so to speak, two sects, which are as much in disagreement about their opinions as they are about their guiding spirit. One group, more literalist, distinguishes every divinity from the other, without being shocked at the multiplicity. The other group, more discriminating, is always seeking to simplify, and it blends certain divinities with others.

The poets have belonged to the first group; philosophers, to the second. But there was precious little philosophy involved in assuming the difficult burden of building superstition into a system and of putting order into what was endlessly confused by the rambling of poets, the fantasy of painters, the greed of priests, and the prodigious fertility of superstition. But there was more than one branch to this immortal quarrel. One group, again less sophisticated, chose to interpret everything literally; the other, more discriminating again, chose to look upon everything as allegory and to refer it to morality and natural philosophy.

Shocked philosophers sought to check the prodigious number of divinities who had passed into the very abstract names of substances. But what great difference was there between those who endowed all of nature with souls, and the theologians, who raised it, of a piece, to the level of divinity? [341]

1898:III, fo. 133

It is* reported that the rebel Mir-Vais[342] is making tremendous progress in Persia, and that the people are everywhere supporting him.

Up until now our princes have exercised their power with so little moderation and have abused human nature so grossly, that I am not surprised that God should permit the people to grow weary of it and to shake off an excessively heavy yoke. Unfortunate lot of subjects! They have practically no legitimate course of defense against oppression, and when they are right in their thinking, they are wrong in their manner.

Take at random the story of any crisis of state. It's a thousand to one that the prince or his minister is to blame. The people, naturally fearful—and with good

reason—far from thinking of making a direct attack on those who hold a dreadful power in their hands, find it very difficult even to decide to complain.

In Persia, we are so persuaded of the truth of that maxim that we continually make use of it. In disputes taking place in the provinces, the court will always decide in favor of the people against those who hold the authority of the prince.

In effect, despotic authority ought never to be delegated. Arbitrary orders should never be arbitrarily executed. It is to the advantage of an unjust prince that the man who carries out his desires—even the most tyrannic —should in so doing, observe the rules of strictest justice.

In despotic states favor goes to the people against the governor or provincial vice-regent. It is just the opposite in monarchies.

Original Ending of Letter CXLIII*

The doctor was a keen man filled with mysteries of the cabala and with the power of words and spirits. This thing struck him, and after much reflection, he decided to change his professional practice completely. "Here is an extraordinary fact," he said. "I have the certainty of one experiment; I must push it further. And why couldn't a mind transmit to its works the same qualities it possesses itself? Don't we see this happening every day? In any case, it's well worth trying. I am sick of apothecaries: their sirups, their potions, and all their Galenic drugs ruin my patients along with their health. Let's change our method; let's put the force of minds to the test." And thereupon, he drew up a new pharmacopoeia, as you shall see from the description I shall make of the principal remedies he put into usage.

PURGATIVE TEA

Take three pages of Aristotle's *Logic*, in Greek, two pages of a treatise on scholastic theology (the most penetrating —as, for example, the subtle Scotus), four pages of Paracelsus, one of Avicenna, six Averroës, three of Porphyry, with an equal quantity of Plotinus and of Iamblichus. Let all the ingredients steep for twenty-four hours, and take four doses a day.

STRONGER PURGATIVE

Take ten D—— of the C——[343] concerning the B—— and C—— of the J——;[344] distill them in a double boiler;

in a glass of common water, macerate a drop of the sharp and biting humor that distills off; swallow the entire dose with confidence.

EMETIC

Take six public speeches, a dozen funeral orations at random (being careful, however, not to use those of M. de N——),[345] a collection of new operas, fifty novels, thirty new memoirs; put all the ingredients into a vial; let them digest for two days; then distill them over a sanded fire.

And, if all this is not strong enough:

ANOTHER, STRONGER, EMETIC

Take a sheet of marbled paper that has been used to cover a collection of the plays of the J.F.;[346] let it steep for three minutes; heat a spoonful of this infusion, and swallow.

A VERY SIMPLE REMEDY FOR ASTHMA

Read all the works of Reverend Father Maimbourg,[347] former Jesuit, taking care to stop only at the end of each rhetorical period, and you will find that the faculty of breathing returns to you bit by bit without any need for repeating the remedy.

TO PROTECT AGAINST MANGE, ITCH, SCURVY, AND HORSE FARCY*

Take three categories of Aristotle, two metaphysical degrees, one distinction,[348] six lines of Chapelain, one phrase drawn from the letters of M. the Abbé of Saint-Cyran; write all the ingredients on a slip of paper; then fold, attach to a ribbon, and wear around the neck.

MIRACULUM CHYMICUM, DE VIOLENTA FERMENTATIONE CUM FUMO, IGNE ET FLAMMA

Misce Quesnellianam infusionem, cum infusione Lallemaniana;[349] *fiat fermentatio cum magna vi, impetu et tonitru, acidis pugnantibus et invicem penetrantibus alcalinos sales: fiet evaporatio ardentium spirituum. Pone liquorem fermentatum in alambico: nihil inde extrahes, et nihil invenies nisi caput mortuum.*

LENITIVUM

Recipe Molinae anodyni chartas duas; Escobaris relaxativi paginas sex; Vasquii emollientis folium unum; infunde in aquae communis lib. iiij. Ad consumptionem dimidiae

partis colantur et exprimantur; et in expressione dissolve Bauni detersivi et Tamburini abluentis folia iij.[350]
Fiat clister.

IN CHLOROSIM QUAM VULGUS PALLIDOS COLORES, AUT FEBRIM AMATORIAM, APPELLAT

Recipe Aretini figuras quatuor; R. Thomae Sanchii De Matrimonio,[351] *folia ij. Infundantur in aquae communis libras quinque.*
Fiat ptisana aperiens.

And those are the drugs our doctor put into practice, with a degree of success you can imagine. In order not to ruin his patients, he said, he did not want to use rare remedies that are practically impossible to find, like, for example, a dedicatory epistle that never made anyone yawn, or a too-short preface, or a pastoral mandate written by a bishop, or the work of a Jansenist either scorned by another Jansenist or admired by a Jesuit. He said that such remedies are good only for encouraging charlatanism, against which he felt an insurmountable antipathy.

GENERAL NOTES

The following notes have leaned heavily on the notes and commentary of successive French editors: Henri Barckhausen (1897 and 1913), Elie Carcassonne (1929), Roger Caillois (1949), and Antoine Adam (1954). When I have borrowed directly from these commentators, I have identified them as follows: (B)—Barckhausen, (Car)—Carcassonne, (Cai)—Caillois, (A)—Adam. Notes followed by (M) are the original notes provided by Montesquieu. The full titles of works referred to here only by name of author will be found listed alphabetically, by author, in the Selective Bibliography. *The Persian Letters* is abbreviated as *PL*, *The Spirit of the Laws* as *Spirit: NRF* refers to the Pléiade edition of Montesquieu's *Oeuvres complètes* (ed. Caillois), 2 vol., Paris, Gallimard, 1949-51.

The notes do not pretend to be exhaustive or complete, but rather suggestive and helpful at points where the text might not be immediately clear to the modern reader.

NOTE ON CURRENCY MENTIONED IN THE PERSIAN LETTERS

Approximate values *ca.* 1720:

12 deniers—1 sol (sou)

20 sols—1 livre (originally signified certain wt. of silver; extremely variable)

1 livre—(approx.) 1 franc

1 écu (petit)—3 livres (or francs)

1 écu (grand)—6 livres (or francs)

1 pistole (originally Spanish gold piece introduced into French use by Louis XIV)—10 livres (or francs)

1 louis—24 livres (or francs)

Before 1726 the relative value of these coins, one to the other, was subject to much fluctuation, reflecting whim rather than logic. For example, in 1724 the louis and the grand écu were, as in this table, equal to 24 livres and 6 livres respectively. In 1725 the louis had fallen to 14 livres, and the écu to 3 livres, 10 sous.

1. An earlier draft of these Reflections exists in the papers at M's chateau, La Brède, under the title Preface to the Readers. It differs perceptibly from the text given in the present edition, which first appeared in the Supplement to the edition of 1754. The

important variant readings for these Reflections as well as for the entire text of *The Persian Letters* will be found under Textual Notes. Entries are indicated on any given page with an asterisk and are identified in the notes by the number of that page and the key word immediately preceding the asterisk. The Reflections are obviously an apology or justification for the *PL*, written much later by M, after the publication of the *Spirit* and the ensuing attacks on that book as well as on the earlier work, in particular by an Abbé Gaultier in his *Lettres persanes convaincues d'impiété*. See C. J. Beyer, "Montesquieu et la censure religieuse dans l'*Esprit* . . ."

2. M throughout the work uses loosely and confuses the terms *seraglio* and *harem*. The seraglio is properly the whole group of buildings of the Sultans at Constantinople, including mosques, palace, etc., and among them, a harem—the whole surrounded by walls running several miles. It is roughly similar to Moscow's Kremlin. In more general usage, the seraglio is the equivalent of the French *hôtel* or the English *townhouse*. The confusion of the two terms seems rather general during the century; cf. Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail* where serail, although properly used, means harem to the popular imagination. The harem is properly the place where women were confined (Arabic: set apart) even before Moslem times. The practice is much reduced although in some Oriental countries upper-class women are customarily secluded.
3. M mentions in a variant *Pamela* and *Lettres péruviennes*. The list could be greatly extended. (See Introduction, p. 16.)
4. Perhaps an allusion to the *Lettres turques* of Sainte-Foix, printed together with the *PL* in a 1744 edition. There were 29 printings of the *PL* during M's lifetime, 10 of the first edition alone.
5. This is very probably a reference to M's wife, who walked with a slight limp.
6. This quotation, under consideration by M as an epigraph to the work (*Pensées, NRF*, I, p. 1002), was never published in any edition. It is taken from the sonnet *All' Italia* in *Poesia Toscana* by Vincenzo da Filicaia (1642-1707). M adapts these lines in which Filicaia refers to my lady Italy as a reference to the role of the harem women. The last three lines of the original sestet read:

Né te vedrei del non tuo ferro cinta
Pugnar col braccio di straniere genti,
Per servir sempre, o vincitrice, o vinta.

Nor would I see you, girded with a foreign sword,
Fighting your battles with a foreigner's arm,
Always serving, though you conquer, or are conquered. (Transl. J. de Simone)

The second epigraph is a liberty taken by the translator and is in no way part of the text of the *PL*. It is taken from the *Défense de l'Esprit des Lois* (Part II: *NRF*, II, p. 1138), written close to the end of M's life. Because he is often accused at this period of the authorship of the *PL*, much of his justification in essence covers the earlier work as well as the *Spirit*.

7. Qum (Kum) is a Persian (Iranian) city in the province of Irak-Adjemi. M gets his information on it from Chardin, III, pp. 1-57. According to Chardin, veneration is paid in the Qum mosque to a Fatima (Fathma), daughter of Mousa al Kassim, sister of Imam Riza (the eighth imam). M seems to confuse her with Fatima, daughter of Mohammed, who in certain prayers is known as "very pure, very just and immaculate Virgin, daughter of Mohammed the Chosen and Ali the Well-Beloved, mother of twelve true vicars of Allah of Illustrious Birth." Jackson (p. 414) says that great honors were accorded her through history, rare honors for a Mohammedan woman. Every mother is, of course, at some time a virgin; M is here inviting an obvious comparison.
8. Erzerum is the chief city of Turkish Armenia. By and large, M takes his geographical itinerary from Tavernier. On the sedentary tastes of Persians, M recalls Chardin, IV, pp. 115 ff. "As for traveling, trips made out of simple curiosity are as inconceivable to Persians as taking a walk."
9. M had the problem of finding Persian-sounding names that would somehow correspond to Western dates. Since the Moslem calendar is a lunar one, an attempt to be precise would only have confused the reader. So he fell on the very simple expedient of starting the year with March, calling it by its corresponding Persian name even though the Persian month, being lunar, started halfway through the month of March. In his haste, or perhaps for other unknown reasons, he transcribed from Chardin, Re-

biab instead of Rebiah, and Chalval instead of Cheval. We have used his dates as he gives them, with the exception of dropping accent marks and changing *ch* to *sh*, and Rahmazan to Ramadan. The modern Persian names for the months are quite different. Below is a kind of concordance, inexact, of course, because of the admixture of solar and lunar months:

Montesquieu	*Moslem Spelling*	*Modern Persian*	*Western*
Maharram	Muharram (30 days)	Favardim (30 days)	March
Saphar	Safar (29)	Ordidzhehest (30)	April
Rebiab I	Rabia I (30)	Khordad (30)	May
Rebiab II	Rabia II (29)	Tir (30)	June
Gemmadi I	Jumada I (30)	Mordad (30)	July
Gemmadi II	Jumada II (29)	Shahrivar (30)	August
Rhegeb	Rajab (30)	Mehr (29)	September
Chahban	Shaban (29)	Aban (29)	October
Rahmazan	Ramadan (30)	Azar (29)	November
Chalval	Shawwal (29)	Dey (29)	December
Zilcadé	Dhu-l-Kada (30)	Bahman (29)	January
Zilhagé	Dhu-l-Hijja (29/30)	Esfand (29)	February

This whole aspect of the *PL* is expertly treated in R. Shackleton "The Moslem Calendar. . . ." As an example of above: M's "The 3rd of the Moon of Gemmadi II" would become August 3.

10. On this custom, see Chardin, II, p. 267, and VI, p. 221; also Herbert, pp. 360, 390. (A) Olearius observed that the Persian women "get into boxes when they travel." They are called, he said, Ketzaweha, and they are slung on camels like bales (p. 457). But it is the report of the diplomatic mission of Figueroa which gives the clearest details. Persian women who travel are shut up in packing cases three feet long, two feet wide, and one foot high. Above this box there is a kind of latticed arc, extending three feet (A), p. 17.
11. On customs of the harem, see Chardin, VI, pp. 232-3. He says that Orientals have always had a reputation for this sort of love. Tavernier (*Nouvelle Relation* . . . , p. 253) says the same of harem women in Constantinople, where cucumbers are never served unsliced.
12. Erivan is now the capital of Armenia, U.S.S.R. It was of great importance during the Persian occupation in the 17th and 18th centuries. It was taken by Russia in 1827. To test M's use of Tavernier as model for his itinerary: Tavernier gives the time between Erivan and Erzerum as 12 days; Usbek makes the trip in 13.

13. From Osman (Othman) I (1259-1326), founder of the Turkish empire, comes the name Ottomans or Osmanlis, synonymous designations the Turks apply to themselves. The 17th century is filled with wars between the Osmanlis and the Persians.
14. An allusion to the great schism between the Sunnites and the Shiites, which almost from the beginning has split Islam. The Shiites (particularly strong in Persia) hold that Ali, son-in-law of Mohammed, is the first true successor to the Prophet. The Sunnites (to which group the Turks belong) hold that the succession proceeds through abu-Bakr (father-in-law of Mohammed and his only companion on the Hegira), Omar, and Osman.
15. Persian women are much more closely guarded than any Indian women (M). Cf. also Chardin, VI, p. 219.
16. On these supposed love affairs of eunuchs, M probably remembers Chardin VI, p. 231 , and Rycaut, Bk. 2, Ch. xxi, p. 369. See *Spirit*, Bk. 15, Ch. xix.
17. A Mohammedan complimentary title given to religious dignitaries; here roughly equivalent to Sorbonne doctors or doctors of religion. M will make the same rough equivalence throughout the book between dervish and monk.
18. Certainly, insofar as it can be said that the *PL* prepares M's later thinking, and especially the *Spirit*, this series of letters on the Troglodytes is the central passage of the book, and so to speak, the very heart of all of M's thinking on government as a social institution. The famous cycle through which the Troglodytes continually turn—despotism, monarchy, republic (democracy)—will remain central to his analysis of the kinds and principles of possible governments in the *Spirit*, as well as to his notion of separation of powers. See the excellent studies by A. Crisafulli on the genesis and development of these ideas: "Parallels to Ideas . . ." and "Montesquieu's Story of the Troglodytes. . . ." For earliest description of the Troglodytes, M uses Herodotus, IV, and Pomponius Mela, I.
19. This whole idealization of simple nature will have a vital place in the thought of the rest of the century. Immediate comparisons are with Morelly, *La Basiliade*, Diderot, *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*, and of course, practically all the writings of Rousseau, in particular, *La Nouvelle Héloise*. The

use made here of the basic idea, and what it will eventually become in, for example, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* suggests *en petit,* a primary intellectual direction of the century.

20. Here, in what might be called the communalism of M's state of nature, is again the kernel from which such varied thinking developed during the century that it is futile even to suggest its broad outlines from Rousseau to the physiocrats and Babeuf. See Crocker, Ch. xv, and Chinard, Introduction to *Code de la Nature.*
21. It seems clear that here M, in the form and the idea of the passage, is remembering Thucydides, one of his favorite authors.
22. See, in the Appendix, p. 284, the important continuation of the story of the Troglodytes. Adam (p. 44, n.) is right in seeing this natural virtue as basically rooted in M's stoicism, rather than in what Mandeville (attacking Shaftesbury) termed "refined Epicureanism."
23. The three tombs found in the Qum mosque are those of Fatima, King Sefi I, and King Abbas II (Chardin, III, p. 46). According to Chardin, there are three guardians, one for each tomb; they are all great lords.
24. Zufagar was the sword given by Mohammed to his son-in-law Ali. The name is mentioned in Rycaut, Bk. 2, Ch. x, p. 298. Olearius (p. 675), leaning on Persian legend, says that the Angel Gabriel gave the sword, named Dzufagar, to Ali. The sword opened in two "like a fork."
25. The nine choirs of the celestial powers: apparently a composite poetic formula M derived from the traditional nine spheres.
26. There are only twelve imams according to the Moslems, thus this thirteenth might suggest (as Adam reports) that the Shiite Persians add Ali to the approved list; or it may be an honorific hyperbole, as Carcassonne suggests, since the Persians admit only twelve imams—Ali plus his eleven descendants. The word as it is used here means the sovereign head of Islam (he who walks ahead) and describes a legitimate successor (depending on the sect) of Mohammed. The other meaning of the word is roughly equivalent to "parish curate," that is, any officiating priest in a mosque. Another possibility is that the thirteenth imam suggests the Mahdi, or returning imam, whom the Persians (Shiites) began to foretell

during the Middle Ages when the caliphate of Islam had for so long been in the hands of the Turks (Sunnites). The imam who was to return and restore legitimacy was to be either the seventh or the twelfth of the true imams, i.e., descendants of Ali. See Jackson.

27. Abyss and Empyrean—poetic and suggestive names used by M for nadir and zenith, lowest point of the earth, where Iblis dwells, and highest heaven, realm of pure fire. *Hawiyah* and *al Firdaous* (B).
28. This is a direct allusion to the Koran (II, 187). The sura reads, in part: "So hold intercourse with them (wives), and seek that which Allah had ordained for you, and eat and drink until the white thread becometh distinct to you from the black thread of the dawn."
29. M probably gets this from Chardin, VII, pp. 105 ff. But M's interest in it is more that of a philosopher than that of a student of comparative customs. It is very apropos to call attention here to an incident, also mentioned by (A), from M's *Pensées*. M was with Fontenelle and Yorke. Fontenelle asked him to "explain the origin of the idea of purity and impurity of the body, which carries pollution to the soul." M replied with this idea from the *PL*: that aversion to impurity is a simple matter of something disagreeable to our senses, but that, since Descartes, such a simple idea is impossible. Fontenelle proposes a more complicated explanation (*NRF*, I, p. 1556, #1677).
30. This is a collection of deeds and sayings of Mohammed and his disciples, collected in the 9th century, particularly, according to (B) by Bukhari and Mouslim; it has become a complimentary text to the Koran.
31. This word is used more by the Turks than by the Persians (M). See also above, note 26.
32. Of Ibselon's story: Moslem tradition (M). Olearius (A) says: "They believe they have reason for great aversion to that animal . . . and on that score tell a dirty and ridiculous story taken from the Koran." Olearius does not mention Abdias Ibesalon; rather than Mohammed, Jesus is questioned by the apostles on Noah's life aboard the ark. The story is not in the Koran.
33. A common idea in the century, this notion that man cannot know everything is behind the optimism of Leibnitz and Pope and turns up in many of the

contes philosophiques, especially in Voltaire and Diderot, who use it with varying degrees of ridicule.

34. Rycaut (Bk. I, Chs. xv and xvii) insists upon this despotic quality of the Turkish government and its unhappy consequences. Chardin, Thévenot, Tournefort, and Du Vignau (A) all insist on the misery and weakness of the Turks.
35. These are, apparently, the Knights of Malta (M).
36. M's predictions here are singularly accurate. See Barckhausen, *Montesquieu, ses idées* . . . , pp. 142-6, for other examples of M's historical foresight.
37. Cf. Chardin, VI, p. 231: White eunuchs guard the exterior of the harem but are not allowed access to the women. Otherwise they are reserved for the service of the king and the great lords he wishes to honor. Tavernier gives much the same information but in greater, sometimes gory, detail (*Nouv. Rel.,* pp. 17-19).
38. Persian women have four (M).
39. The sale of titles was widespread under Louis XIV. As Pontchartrain (A) said to the monarch: "Every time Your Majesty creates an office, God creates some fool to buy it."
40. From 1689 on, there was continual monetary difficulty, with accompanying devaluations in currency. Louis XIV had created paper wealth to the amount of 600 millions, which in 1713 were negotiable at only seventeen per cent of their nominal value. "From 1709 on, the money value changed so frequently that its exact equivalent could be discovered only with great difficulty." (Dom Leclercq, *Histoire de la Régence,* I, p. 198.)
41. Allusion to the cure of scrofula. It was believed that the kings of France, after coronation, could cure the disease by the simple laying on of hands. Rica's astonishment here is somewhat out of place, since Persian kings were also believed to bring about miraculous cures (Chardin, VI, p. 14). Perkins (p. 551) says that at the coronation of Louis XV, such healing powers were regarded with incredulity even by those who insisted that the pretense should be continued.
42. The daring of this paragraph caused some difficulty when M was about to be admitted to the French Academy. In the *Spicilège* (*NRF,* II, p. 1284), M in a more serious mood sees the continuing symbolic significance of the communion as following from

ancient religious (particularly Jewish) rites of sacrifice. (A) also notes this passage.

43. The Constitution was the name given to the papal bull starting "*Unigenitus.*" It was promulgated on September 8, 1713. Thus M has made a slip here in his dating (See Shackleton, "The Moslem Calendar . . ."). Too much could not be said about this bull, which animates, as it were, the thought of the whole century. Promulgated by Clement XI, it essentially outlawed 101 errors (see Fremantle, pp. 85-103) in a book by the Jansenist Père Pasquier Quesnel, and in general, it condemned Jansenism. Religious reaction was to continue the strife between Jesuit and Jansenist, with the Jansenists now somewhat underground, until after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1762. Political reaction came in the *parlements*, where there was much Jansenist sympathy and much resentment against the arbitrary acceptance of the bull by the King on behalf of a vehemently Gallican population. See Perkins, Ch. vi.
44. But see later, Letter CXLI.
45. These were the Jansenists. Louis XIV's dervishes are the Jesuits.
46. M uses "dervish" throughout as a rough equivalent of monk. Above, he used "mufti" in the sense (given by Chardin and Tavernier) of chief of ecclesiastic discipline. Tournefort pointed out that the Turks (it is a Turkish term) called the Pope, the Mufti of Rome. M tries to find Oriental titles for all Western ecclesiastic and religious terms, except one. Rather than use "Allah," he prefers the literal translation, God.
47. Chardin (II, pp. 220-21) speaks of protection given to women in travel. (See also note 10, above.) He also speaks at length of the long struggles of love (II, pp. 268-9). There is the case of the daughter of Abbas the Great, who "for a long time would not look her husband in the face" and armed herself with a dagger. But royal princesses, says Chardin, are a particularly difficult case. M chooses to use the unusual.
48. This idea of the weakening of natural virtue by worldly education, which M uses as an interesting debatable question, will become the clarion call and central truth of Rousseau.
49. Ispahan (M).
50. Crutches—canes (Car).

51. When Rica speaks of the stage and the action thereon, he is referring to the loges at the Comédie Française. The letter of the operatic artist recalls a whole literary tradition, which extended from the 17th far into the 18th century, of the theatrical woman as a type. Dufresny, in his *Amusements*, V, for example, says "they are naturally very generous." Despite Voltaire's attempt to rescue the true artists (e.g., Adrienne Lecouvreur) from social ostracism, the stereotype of the actress remains a lady of easy virtue.
52. Imeretia (Imirette in Chardin's spelling) and Georgia were Circassian states, now under the Turks, now under the Persians.
53. The *Espion turc* of Marana speaks more cruelly of the Pope than does M. On several occasions Marana accuses the pontiff of pride and ambition (II, Letter 28; IV, 13; V, 82).
54. Distinction is a term of dialectic: using the several meanings of a proposition in order to escape difficulties. Cf. Pascal in the *Lettres provinciales*. M. also means the word in its common sense: thus, a *double-entendre*.
55. Two ribbons—scapulary. Galicia is the Spanish province where a famous pilgrimage objective, Santiago de Compostela, is located.
56. M, of course, is attacking the Inquisition. About it, the *Espion turc* (II, Letter 73) says: "The first things the Holy Inquisitors do is to make an exact and devout search of the prisoner's possessions. If they find he is rich, no more evidence is needed to find him guilty; and the good fathers very piously set about disposing of what he has."
57. The Persians are the most tolerant of all the Mohammedans (M).
58. Cf. *Espion turc*, I, Letter 71. This aspect of French character was not limited to M's time; cf. the following from J. Christopher Herold, *Mistress to an Age* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1958, p. 71):

> But the crowd he [Charles de Constant] met at Mme de Stael's was not curious about China. Two or three fine gentlemen approached me and said: "So you have been in China, sir?" and without waiting for an answer, they pirouetted on their heels and went on to talk about the theatre. . . . All these conversations are about trifles and a man

who does not know the names of writers and the important people . . . is looked upon as a stupid animal and nobody says a word to him.

For another example of the timelessness (or rather timeliness) of the satire in the *PL*, see Henri Cottez's amusing and witty article on the *PL* as the book of the day. He ends, with tongue in cheek, using one of the more daring harem passages as an example to point out that the *PL* in 1949 would justify Claude-Edmonde Magny in her conviction of the existence of an obscure fatality that hovers over our modern world.

59. M has, elsewhere, a better opinion of Amsterdam than of Venice as a water city (*Voyages, NRF*, I, p. 869).
60. The asylum or home known as the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts; it was founded in 1254 by Saint Louis for three hundred men blinded by the Saracens.
61. An ancient part of Paris (now third and fourth arrondissements), formerly swamp; site of Molière's first theater and noted, in the past, for fine town houses.
62. The *Lettre d'un Sicilien*, p. 14, says: "I have never seen such numbers of blind people; they circulate without guides throughout the city, and walk, several of them together, amid a swarm of carts, carriages, and horse—with the same certainty as if they had eyes on their feet. They dwell together in a house called Hospice des Quinze-Vingts, where they are fed by popular charity."
63. Cf. *Lettre d'un Sicilien*, p. 29: "Wine costs a moderate price when it arrives at the city gates, but as soon as it is brought in, it changes into potable gold." (A) (p. 87) points out a 1715 manuscript (in the Arsenal Library, Paris) that analyzes the flood of incidental charges on wine delivered in Paris.

The Koran says (e.g., V, 90): O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that you may succeed."
64. On the intemperance of Persian kings, M probably uses Chardin, VI, p. 18.
65. Chardin (IV, pp. 203 ff.) notes in particular the artificial euphoria produced by the poppy. But (A) (with much justification) thinks M refers here to coffee, the future of which in 18th-century Paris was bright; see Letter XXXVI.

66. This expression, "*condition humaine*," used first by Montaigne, is to become a classic expression in French thought; cf., title of Malraux's novel. M had a natural attraction to Stoicism, despite Usbek's view.
67. On Persian sobriety, see Chardin, IV, p. 111.
68. M uses here against the Turks what the mufti Esad Effendi, according to Rycaut (Bk. 2, Ch. x) said to the Persians: "I trust . . . that on Judgment Day the Divine Majesty will cause you to serve as asses to the Jews and that that miserable people which is the scourge of the world will mount you and ride off to hell at a trot."
69. (Car) notes: "One feels this is a way of recommending tolerance to the Christians themselves. One of the first essays of M, says d'Alembert (*Eloge de Montesquieu*) was a work in epistolary form whose object was to prove that the idolatry of the majority of Pagans did not seem to merit eternal damnation."
70. The *Espion turc* (II, Lett. 1, and IV, Lett. 24) also points out resemblances between Christian and Mohammedan religions.
71. *Polygamia triumphatrix* (565 pp.) by Theophilus Alatheus (pseud., Jean Leyser, a German Lutheran pastor), published *ca.* 1682. It had been preceded, in 1674, by a shorter treatment in *Discursus politicus de Polygamia* (76 pp.). Ideas in *PL* on polygamy remain those of M's later years in *Spirit*. See Roger B. Oake, "Polygamy in the *Lettres persanes*."
72. M is inaccurate here; Moslems are required to pray only five times a day.
73. Chardin (VII, pp. 269-71) says there are no intercessors, properly speaking, in the Mohammedan religion. The invocation of saints by a devout Moslem is merely a good work of which Allah will take note.
74. For reasons of comparison and possible influence, cf., J. F. Bernard, Ch. iii, pp. 55-7.
75. The Café Procope, which figures prominently in 18th-century literature. (A) suggests others.
76. The Greek poet is Homer. La Motte reproached him for his lack of manners. Mme Dacier defended Homer. And out of these beginnings in 1714, the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns (second round) broke out, encouraging a concomitant Battle of the Books in England.
77. The Latin of the Schoolmen.
78. These were Irish priests taking refuge in France against English persecution; in 1677 a Seminary was instituted by them (Davidson). See O. R. Taylor,

"Irish Friend of Montesquieu . . . ," for a good example of one of them. Routh wanted the manuscript of *PL* on M's death, to clean it up. Voltaire accuses him of this although there is not complete agreement as to Routh's motives.

79. The youngest minister of Louis XIV was Barbézieux (son of Louvois), who was secretary of state in 1691 at the age of 23. The 80-year-old mistress is, of course, Mme de Maintenon, who was really only 78 at the date of this letter. (A) points out that the minister could be the Marquis de Cany (son of Chamillart), who was 18 when he inherited the position of secretary of state. He also notes that others had pointed out this age discrepancy before M. M comes back to this point often in his *Pensées* and *Spicilège*. As to Louis XIV's Orientalism, Marana (A), p. 98, said: "They have no scruple against calling him the Very Christian Turk, and this is even the way of speaking of his factious subjects." See especially, M's estimate of Louis XIV (via St-Simon) on this score in *Spicilège* (*NRF*, II, p. 1372).
80. A reference to the strict Catholicism of the Jansenists.
81. Usbek is referring to his own prince.
82. For another view of Louis XIV, see M's thought in *Pensées* (*NRF*, I, pp. 1389 ff.). He blames much of the reign on Louis XIV's advisers, in particular, the Jesuits. "I do not believe," he says, "that France is Europe, as Louis XIV did, but that she is the first power in Europe."
83. On the co-operative nature of Parisian husbands, see *Lettre d'un Sicilien*, pp. 23, 43, and 46.
84. The philosopher with a penchant for the ladies is Fontenelle, who was famous for his *galant* scientific dialogues, e.g., *Sur la pluralité des mondes*.
85. Koran, II, 228: "And they [women] have rights similar to those of men over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is mighty, wise." On the Sarmatians, M had quoted Pomponius Mela in his *Spicilège* (*NRF*, II, p. 1275).
86. Hadji is a man who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca (M).
87. The legends alluded to in this letter are reported in similar terms by Nau (I, 12-14) and Baudier (pp. 18-19) (A).
88. This custom of the Mogul (still in practice in some quarters of the world) was described by Tavernier (A).
89. Mme d'Aulnoy (II, p. 154) recounts the following:

"Some time ago a Spanish woman, just arrived from Naples, begged the King [of Spain] for an audience, and when she had stared at him long enough, carried away with enthusiasm, said, clasping her hands: 'I pray God, Sire, that he permit you the honor of one day becoming viceroy of Naples.'"

90. This was said of Alexander the Great by Quintus Curtius (X, Ch. v).
91. *Lettre d'un Sicilien*, p. 44: "I have heard it said that there are more alchemists here than cooks." There is probably an allusion here to the Regent, the Duke of Orleans, who was personally interested in alchemy, not to mention the fact that he was interested in finding a way to create money. Davidson thinks M was thinking of a physician named Boudin, who imagined he had rediscovered the secrets of alchemy.
92. Nicolas Flamel (1330-1418) was supposed to have found the philosopher's stone. Raymond Lully (1235-1315) was a Franciscan monk of the Balearic Islands interested in theology and the occult sciences.
93. The first paragraph reminds the reader of the important passages of Pierre Bayle (whom M admired with qualifications) to the effect that atheism does not necessarily corrupt morals. The whole letter is an exposition of a favorite stand of M (although he never openly disavowed Catholicism) to the effect that civil morality is the true basis of all religion, an idea that was to be much developed in the century into theories of natural religion, either deistic or theistic.
94. A Jew (M).
95. A Turk (M).
96. An Armenian (M). (Car) says that he has found no author to show that the Armenian religion forbade eating animals.
97. As (Car) points out, the Brahman's indulgence here seems strange, since he is generally forbidden to eat the flesh of animals.
98. Tavernier (*Six voyages*, II, Bk. 3, Ch. v) says Indians "abhor killing any animal for fear of being guilty of causing the death of one of their family or friends doing penance in the animal body."
99. From Chardin, VI, p. 238. "When the wives of the king, or of a very important personage, go out, they are escorted by eunuchs and horsemen who shout '*courouc*' [forbidden], to scatter the population. Disobedience to the call could mean death."

100. Without trying to read too much into every detail, it seems clear that what is said here could well apply to M's own character. See other autobiographical details in Barrière, "*Eléments bordelais. . . .*"
101. The tax collector, or tax farmer (*fermier-général*), was an extremely influential person during the *ancien régime,* and particularly during the 18th century. As M points out with a bit of snobbery, the collectors were particularly important *after* they had made their fortunes. Helvétius, for example, owed his wealth, leisure, and ability to act as host to the *philosophes* to this background. In brief, the taxes required from a certain area were fixed at a certain sum of money, then the collection was farmed out to an individual who had bought the right to collect. He collected a minimum of what was required and a maximum limited only by his own energy and enterprise. The difference between the two figures was eventually his fortune and was usually very substantial. The normal French attitude to taxes (particularly the peasants' attitude at this period) is due in great part to the inherent injustice of the system.
102. On this familiar stock character of satire, comparisons could be made with Boileau, the maximists like La Rochefoucauld, and in particular, La Bruyère, who doubtlessly influenced M greatly in his letters of social satire. There is a similar barb in Molière's *Misanthrope.*
103. This compares closely to the portrait of the "*joli homme*" in Dufresny, *Amusements,* XI, pp. 228-38. (A) believes the model here may be the young Duc de Richelieu (see Perkins, pp. 583-4).
104. A "*fantaisie*" was a picture, or genre of painting, in which the painter followed his own fancy; Littré says "Arabesques are *fantaisies.*"
105. Casbin was an ancient capital of Persia, in which Chardin counted forty Christian families. He mentions establishments of Capuchins in several Persian cities (Cai). Père Pacifique de Provins's *Relation du voyage de Perse* (1631) says the Capuchins were in rivalry with the Augustinians and Discalced Carmelites in founding missions in Persia (A).
106. A provincial was a regional superior of several houses of the same religious order.
107. As (A) points out, this letter would seem to have been inspired by the visit of Peter the Great to the West and by his stay in Paris in 1717. The transla-

tion of Perry's book (*Etat présent . . .*) appeared during the next year; the *Mémoires de Trévoux* devoted many pages to Russia; and in general the visit was much in the public eye.

108. These customs have changed (M). On reforms of Peter I in affairs matrimonial, M probably saw Perry, pp. 191-3 (A).

109. The *Espion turc* (III, Lett. 1) says "I know a gentleman . . . who has lived for several years in Moscow. He says that Russian women do not think themselves loved by their husbands unless they are beaten by them every day. They regard such punishment as a mark of the esteem and affection their husbands have for them. If these simple women are angry or oppressed there is no other way to put them back into a good humor except to birch them." (A) traces the tradition of this view of Russia to the 16th century.

110. Huet (A) had already noted this travel restriction. Perry, p. 146, says: "Formerly every Muscovite was forbidden under pain of death to leave the country without special permission of the Patriarch." Fontenelle, who wrote several times to Peter, did much to change the mistaken French view of Russia after the reforms of Peter. See (A) (p. 134) for additional details.

111. The well-known order of Peter the Great outlawing beards. M in the *Spirit* (Bk. 19, Ch. xiv) considers this a tyrannical gesture.

112. Perry, p. 200, has much to say on this subject.

113. The inspiration for this letter, as well as for a similar game in Lesage's *Diable boiteux,* is probably to be traced to the Chapter "On Women" in La Bruyère's *Caractères.*

114. Baghdad was taken for the last time by the Turks in 1638; Kandahar was taken by the Persian Abbas II in 1649.

115. Dufresny's Siamese is no less struck by this vogue (*Amusements,* X). The fragment of a Siamese letter inserted in the *Amusements,* pp. 152-7, is the description of a game of lansquenet, which the traveler takes for a religious ceremony. Dufresny also wrote two comedies (*Chevalier joueur,* 1696, and *La Joueuse,* 1709) on the subject. Regnard's famous play *Le Joueur* dates from 1696. The dimensions of the gambling disease in both sexes is obvious from many other documents during the last half of Louis XIV's reign.

116. Chardin, IV, p. 136, and Koran, II, 219, and V, 90.
117. The three-sided god of the triangles comes from Spinoza, *Opera posthuma,* 1677 (Epistola LVII, ed., Vloten et Land, quoted by A. Crisafulli in *Romanic Review,* XLVI, p. 295).
118. This figure of the earth as an atom, or insignificant bit of mud, had great popularity in the century; cf. particularly Voltaire's *Contes.* Fénélon had already used it in *Télémaque* (a favorite of M).
119. This passage should be seen in terms of M's later plea, in the *Spirit* (Bk. 25, Ch. xiii): "*La très humble remonstrance aux Inquisiteurs d'Espagne et de Portugal.*" The harassed Christians with ideas unlike the Prince's, are, of course, the Protestants expelled by Louis XIV's Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685). See, among many other references to the Revocation in *Pensées* and *Spicilège,* note 409 of *Spicilège* (*NRF,* II, p. 1331).
120. Cf. above, note 14.
121. Palafox (Ch. iv, p. 74) reports that when Sun-Shi, first Tatar (Manchurian) emperor of China, in the 17th century ordered his new subjects to cut their hair, several of them preferred death. There is no record of a general revolt on this score (A).
122. The incident is the massacre of Thessalonica in 390. Ambrose is Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan.
123. Abbé Gaultier (later, in 1751) countered this question of M by: "It mattered to religion to give a lofty idea of the priesthood and to teach even emperors not to confuse spiritual power and temporal power."
124. Chardin (II, p. 271) says: "Girls are not shut up, even daughters of the great lords, until after the age of seven or eight."
125. For readers who have held the harem scenes purely incidental, this letter is particularly instructive. It is M's contribution to a psychology of love between the sexes; the theme is obvious throughout the letters, most particularly in the concluding suicide of Roxane. In its briefest statement, M's concern is the degree to which personal freedom can be preserved in the sacrifice of love. There are times when he seems to suggest, like Proust, that love can be essentially only tyrannical for one of the partners, and that freedom in love is impossible and a contradiction. The broadest contrast drawn between East and West on this subject is that the Persians have accepted and institutionalized the inherent tyranny of love, while the Parisians' attitudes toward love are in a full transition,

in which freedom bids fair to become license. M is interested in the whole question for many reasons. In particular, he is interested in biological or physical differences of the sexes as bases for subsequent institutions concerning love and marriage. Of the various approaches to love between the sexes, the several episodes (hors d'oeuvres)—Apheridon and Astarte, Anaïs, etc.—as well as the continual contrast between Paris and Persia (not forgetting the eunuchs) give varied examples.

126. According to Chardin (VI, pp. 231-46), black eunuchs were generally not African Negroes but swarthy men from the Malabar coast.

127. M, in *Pensées*, says: "Whenever I have traveled in strange countries, I have become as attached to them as to my own country." *NRF*, I, p. 976.

128. The Ghebers (or Gabars) are descendants of the ancient Persians who have remained faithful to the religion of Zoroaster (Zarathustra). Chardin (IX, pp. 132-51) speaks of them as a peaceful, hard-working, but stupid and uncultured people. Jackson estimates the number of Ghebers (*ca.* 1900) in Persia to be about 11,000. The term Gheber is derogatory, meaning "unbeliever" as a Zoroastrian is in the eyes of the Mohammedans. The Ghebers prefer to call themselves Zardushtian, Bah-Dinan, or Parsis (Farsis) from the name of the old province of Persia proper. The religion that flourished under Cyrus and his forebears was put to sore trial by the invasion of Islam. A group of the Persian sect fled to India then, and is to this day, more flourishing there—under the name of Parsis—than are its cobelievers in Persia. As M explains in this anecdote, some of the details of the more ancient worship of Mithra were preserved by Zoroaster, but the worship of the elements (e.g., fire) was symbolical as a manifestation of Ormazd (or Ahura-Mazda) rather than direct worship of them as divinities. For more details on the Ghebers (*ca.* 1900) see Jackson, Chs. xxiii and xxiv. Cf. also Voltaire's play *Les Guèbres*.

129. According to Herodotus (III, Ch. xxxi), Cambyses, wishing to marry one of his sisters, had this type of marriage legalized among the Persians. Chardin, Herbert, Tavernier, and Lord do not mention this usage as belonging to the Ghebers. Nor does Jackson, except at the remote period of Zoroaster himself, *ca.* 650 B.C. (p. 62).

130. *Beiram*—harem.
131. There is some confusion here in M's mind. In an earlier letter (XXIII) he has the Persian speak of a jalousie as of something quite new and Occidental.
132. According to Chardin (IX, pp. 139-41) it is difficult to ascertain whether the Ghebers are idolaters or not. "They hold or pretend to hold that there is a supreme being who is above *Principals* and *Causes*. . . . Still they attribute so much power to the Principals that they seem to leave nothing for the *Sovereign*, which leads me to think that they confess the existence of a Supreme Being only out of decorum and in order not to be abhorred by the Mohammedans. . . . They hold that the *Celestial Bodies* are *Beings* animated by *Intelligences* who play a role in the conduct of men." Tavernier (*Six voyages*, I, Bk. 4, Ch. viii) says that the Ghebers are not idolaters. See note 128, above.
133. Balkh, anciently Bactra, is the holy city of Zoroastrianism where, traditionally, Zoroaster was born. Jackson (p. 58) says his birthplace was "the district west or southwest of the Caspian Sea, not far, apparently, from the city of Urumiah."
134. Gushtasp (Vishtaspa), king of Persia, lived *ca.* 500 B.C. He imposed Zoroastrianism in his realm. He is identified with Hystaspes, the father of Darius, although perhaps not the same. Hohoraspe (Aurvataspa) is a legendary king, father of Vishtaspa. Jackson calls Gushtasp the "Constantine of Zoroastrianism."
135. "A toman equals 15 écus of our money." Chardin, II, p. 252. That is, 45 livres (Tavernier says 46 livres, 1 denier) (A). Jackson puts the toman (*ca.* 1900) at roughly equal to one dollar (pp. 46, 276).
136. The painter Zeuxis, who, it is said, used five different models for his Helen for the Agrigentines.
137. (Car) notes: The whole metaphysics of this letter—in idea and expression—seems to echo the *Theodicy* of Leibnitz."
138. M's insistence on the virtue of modesty, apparent throughout the letters, becomes very clear here. This notion of man knowing naturally his duties toward God will have a rich philosophic fortune in the rest of the century, particularly in the deist and theist positions.
139. Chardin (II, pp. 271-2) says that although Persian husbands can repudiate their wives at will, they do

not often use this right. (A) shows that the incident of Charles of Lorraine's repudiation of his wife in 1721 may be the inspiration for this letter and for the next, neither of which is given in Text B.

140. Deuteronomy, XXIII, 13-21. The lawgiver of edition E (see textual notes) is Moses. (A) adds that M had in mind a recent lawsuit in the process of which the Marquise de Gesvres charged her husband with impotence. The Marquis held that proof "by the inspection of the woman is uncertain." M has a note on this affair in *Spicilège*, *NRF*, II, 1280-81.

141. (Car) calls attention to the portrait of a "*décisionnaire*" (M's invention) without the name in Dufresny, *Amusements*, XI, pp. 250-61.

142. Tavernier and Chardin were, among others (see Introduction, p. 14), the most important sources of M's knowledge of Persia.

143. The dictionary of the French Academy, 1694. This cruel treatment of the Academy, although merited both by—as (A) supposes—the expelling of M's friend the Abbé de Saint-Pierre and by the continuing general scorn expressed by the French people at many moments since the Academy's foundation, is all the more amazing when it is remembered that M tried and finally managed to join its ranks in 1728.

144. The bastard child is Furetière's dictionary, published in 1690. It was immediately seized by the police, and Furetière was expelled from the Academy, which *finally* published its own dictionary.

145. This is to be compared with M's famous ironic passage in the *Spirit*, Bk. 15, Ch. v.

146. The Mohammedans have no interest in conquering Venice because they would not find proper water there for their purifications (M).

147. Throughout the *PL*, M has insisted upon nothing so much as the fact that society is born in the family and therefore rests upon a principle of mutual benefit. As can be expected from his other writings, he is clearly opposed to Hobbes. Rousseau, working with the same basic idea, will develop a quite different notion of the rights of the individual within a mutual benefit society.

148. A reflection of Oriental ideas of transmigration and metempsychosis. Diderot will use somewhat the same idea in reverse in the *Rêve de D'Alembert*, speculating on the development of human sensitivity from inanimate objects like a piece of turf.

149. Crocker, p. 78, has an interesting and perceptive note on this passage: "It is most curious that Sade quotes the passage at length (*Histoire de Juliette*, IV, 241), and in doing so, changes several words and phrases, notably the end which he makes read, '. . . are only subtle and fine atoms, *indifferent to nature*.' Since none of the editions of *Lettres persanes* has this reading, the changes were doubtless willful." A good example, as Crocker points out, of the great changes ideas went through during the century.
150. (Car) notes: "The first edition of the *Considerations on the Romans* (Ch. xii) contained a note in favor of suicide which Montesquieu later suppressed; but the *Spirit* (Bk. 14, Ch. xii) will still tend to excuse suicide for the Romans and the English, and certain critics will take advantage of this to denounce in Montesquieu a partisan of natural law." See textual notes on this letter.
151. Mme d'Aulnoy (I, p. 106) says: "The Spanish . . . have always been known for being proud and glorious; their glory is mixed with gravity; and they push it so far that it might be called overweening pride." The same idea appears in the *Espion turc*, II, Lett. 64, and V, Lett. 34.
152. Mme d'Aulnoy (II, pp. 139-42) was surprised to see so many young Spanish ladies wearing glasses. She was informed that "they were for seriousness and that they were not worn because they were needed but to attract respect."
153. Jean de Castro (M). Viceroy of Portuguese India (Cai).
154. This story is reported slightly differently in *La Vida de Dom Joao de Castro*, by Freyre de Andrada (Paris, 1769, new edition, pp. 320-29). Castro, needing money, asked the Chamber of Goa to advance him 20,000 pardaos, and he sent them as a guaranty a few hairs from his head. The Chamber lent him more than he requested and considered him released from his "honored and illustrious security."
155. Mme d'Aulnoy (III, pp. 71-2): "You will probably not be unhappy to know that when giving proof of one's noble birth here, a man must prove that he descends on both sides of the family from *viejos cristianos*, that is to say, old Christians."
156. Mme d'Aulnoy (III, p. 114) says: "There is no merchant to be found—be he cabinetmaker or saddler or any other—who is not dressed in velvets

and satins, like the King, having his great sword, dirk, and guitar hung up in his shop. They work just as little as possible." Or again (III, pp. 190-91): "A peasant is seated in his chair reading an old novel while others work for him and take all his money." On the pride and laziness M sees in the Spanish, see *Spirit*, Bk. 19, Chs. ix and x.

157. Mme d'Aulnoy (III, p. 85) reports: "The only pleasure and the sole occupation of Spaniards is to have a love affair." She adds (II, p. 126) that "the final favor" of a Spanish lady for her swain would be to show him her foot. On the passion of Spaniards, cf. Mme d'Aulnoy, III, pp. 85-6.
158. *Don Quijote*.
159. The Batuecas (M). These are the valleys in the mountainous region between Salamanca and Estremadura which, it is said, remained unexplored for a long time (B). Davidson calls this "an invention of some wag which Montesquieu seems to have taken seriously."
160. Despite the sop of the last paragraphs, it is clear that M, throughout his life, felt nothing but contempt for the Spanish; as a Bordelais, he could scarcely be accused of judging in a vacuum. See *Spicilège*, *NRF*, II, p. 1328, #392-3, *Pensées*, *NRF*, I, pp. 1380, #1573-9 and 1494-1502, #1988-2002. See (A), p. 204, for limitation on Mme d'Aulnoy's veracity.
161. Later, in the *Spirit*, M, retaining his personal predilection for the monarchy, will hold somewhat to the same criterion, adding considerations like climate, religion, and customs.
162. These ideas show up in the *Spirit*, e.g., Bk. 6, Chs. ix, xii, and xvi. Such thinking is basic throughout the century, culminating in Beccaria's *Trattato dei dellitti e delle pene*, 1764, a rejection of capital punishment.
163. Chardin, however, while he points out the severity of punishment in Persia (VI, pp. 293 ff.), states that public morality is exemplary and crimes are rare (VI, p. 287).
164. Again comparison can be made with the *Spirit* (Bk. 5, Ch. xi): "It can be seen generally that in disorders of despotic governments, the people, led by themselves, always carry things as far as they can go; all disorders committed by the people go to extremes . . . Thus all of our history books are full of civil wars without revolutions; the histories of despotic states are full of revolutions without civil wars."

165. Osman II was deposed and strangled in 1622. Mustafa I, deposed in 1618 in favor of his nephew Osman II, recalled in 1622, and deposed again in 1623, was strangled in 1633 on the order of Murad IV.
166. In the 13th century under Genghis Khan; again in the 17th century.
167. See above, note 134.
168. (Car). This enthusiasm for the Tatars recalls an anecdote told by Père Castel in his *Homme moral opposé à l'homme physique* (Toulouse, 1756), pp. 125-6: "Having one day gone to see the famous President Montesquieu, more than thirty years ago and at the beginning of our friendship, I found him in a sort of rapture, transported by the discovery he had just made of a particularly conquering race of the universe: now, this race was the Tatars. At that time M. de Montesquieu was on the 18th or 28th conquering irruption made by that race into our triple continent Europe-Asia-Africa." (A). A note in M's papers shows he had studied this subject in the works of Petis de la Croix and Brother Carpini. He quotes them both in *Réflexions sur la Monarchie universelle*.
169. This appeal to the innate sense of justice and the power of the heart again foreshadows the system Rousseau will erect from this single consideration. Cf. also M's *Traité des devoirs* and the article by A. Crissafulli "Parallels to Ideas. . . ." M leans heavily on Shaftesbury for the idea of this letter.
170. A refuge and home built by Louis XIV for war veterans; construction was begun as early as 1670. It is still a famous landmark of Paris; the body of Napoleon I is entombed in its former chapel.
171. Shah Suleiman reigned in Persia from 1666 to 1694, at first under the name of Sefi II (Cai).
172. An allusion to an incident reported by Tavernier (*Six voyages*, I, Bk. 5, Ch. viii). A favorite of Shah Suleiman by the name of Ali Kyli-Khan, dissatisfied with the Armenians, had inspired in the king the idea of forcefully converting them to Islam. The prince later gave up the plan—less out of tolerance than from personal interest. Also, of course, an allusion to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. See note 174, below.
173. Tavernier reports (Car) that the Armenians paid ten thousand tomans to the king, and four or five thousand to his favorite.

174. As he does throughout his published and unpublished writings, M is here again insisting upon Louis XIV's great sin: the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Possibly out of some well-meant ardor for the true religion, aided and abetted by advisers, and pressured by considerations not purely religious, Louis revoked the famous edict in 1685, not quite a century after it had been promulgated by Henri IV. Having already suffered many indignities during the century before the Revocation, the Protestants (or Huguenots) left France in great numbers, taking with them a propensity for hard work, an important source of capital and industry, and a perceptible tax potential. It is fair to say that Louis XIV's fortunes —militarily, economically, and personally—went only down after 1685, along with the fortunes of France. At the time of the *PL*, ideas of religious tolerance were not common (Car), although things were much better during the Regency than before and after. After the death of Louis XIV, the Protestants left in France tried to return to their religious services, but the Catholic bishops complained, and a declaration (May 14, 1724, after Orléan's death) renewed the ban on assembly, on pain of extreme punishment: the congregation risked perpetual service in the galleys and the pastors, death. See *Spirit*, Bk. 25, Chs. ix ff.; also note 119, above.
175. Read also, Catholics and Protestants.
176. Cf., M's *Pensées*, *NRF*, I, p. 1140, #616. This single thought recurs perhaps more than any other in the *PL*. Society had its natural source in the family.
177. The gallery of the courthouse was filled with shops (Car). Dufresny (*Amusements*, IV) had already taken his Siamese there and found an excuse for several inoffensive shots at the chicanery and solicitations of the attorneys.
178. This is anachronistic; the proof, or ordeal *du congrès*, had been abolished by the *parlement* of Paris in 1677. But see note 140, above.
179. The doormen at the street gates of most Parisian town houses being Swiss, M takes this occasion to ridicule their handwriting.
180. In the *Spirit* (Bk. 3, Ch. v), M says: "In the most beautiful machines, art uses as few movements, constraints, and wheels as possible." From the 17th century on, bourgeois specialists rather than the great by birth carried on most of the important government business.

181. Rousseau, who, as can be felt easily after reading M, gleaned many of his ideas from him, would most certainly have disagreed on this point. Self-preservation is natural but the desire for fame is perverted.
182. The tribunal of the *Maréchaux de France* (Cai). The importance of honor as the governing principle of monarchy is brought out more clearly in the *Spirit,* Bk. 3.
183. M writes in the *Spirit* (Bk. 3, Ch. viii): "Honor, unknown to despotic states . . . reigns in monarchies; it gives life to the whole political body, to the laws, and even to virtue itself." It will be remembered that honor was the ruling *principle* for monarchy, just as fear was the principle for despotism, and virtue for republics.
184. Rome, Athens, and Sparta are very frequently on M's mind and on his pen. Despite his continuing slight prejudice for monarchy, it is clear that it was in these city-states and in studying them assiduously that he would find the true natural ideal of government. Later, in the *Spirit,* M distinguishes between the honor of a monarchy and the honor here described. In the later work he calls this republican honor, *virtue.*
185. In the *Spirit* (Bk. 3, Ch. vi), M will call this simply honor, "that is to say, the prepossession of each person and each class."
186. On the matter of judicial combat, comparison can be made with the *Spirit,* Bk. 28, Chs. xviii-xxvii.
187. In the *Spirit* (Bk. 28, Ch. xvii), M will observe: "Ordeal and trial by single combat had a certain justification based on experience. In a nation geared only to war, cowardice presupposes other vices." (Car) notes: "Here is one of the points where the difference between the two works is patent: explanation (sometimes overly ingenious) of what is or has been, has been substituted for satire."
188. The problem of the duel continued to be an important one far into the 18th century—this despite the attempts of Richelieu to put a stop to dueling, and the law that Louis XIV, concerned at the useless destruction of the nobility, promulgated against duels. (A) points out a letter on the duel in Marana (II, Lett. 19) and a work of 1715 by the Abbé de Saint-Pierre *"Mémoire pour perfectionner la police contre le duel."*
189. Mohammed Riza Beg, envoy of Shah Husein, made his entry into Paris on February 6, 1715. His strange

looks, his avarice, and his pride made him disagreeable and ridiculous, and some people refused to see in him a real ambassador (Car). Cf. Maurice Herbette. Saint-Simon accused Ponchartrain of fabricating this embassy to flatter Louis XIV (Cai). (A) says this suspicion was false; Riza Beg (Bey) was calender of the province of Erivan.

190. He died September 1, 1715 (M).

191. The very day after the King's death, the Duc d'Orléans went before the *Parlement* and asked that the will be broken and complete powers of regent given to him. This the *Parlement* did on September 2, 1715. On September 15, the Regent returned to the *parlements* their *droit de remontrance*, i.e., the right to object to any aspect of a royal edict. The rule of strong, individual first ministers turned into the rule of councils. These steps reduced to nothing the possibility of Louis XIV's bastard son, the Duc de Maine, playing an important role in the Regency, a role that Louis probably planned for him as a check on Orléans.

192. The term *parlement* was first assigned to assemblies of great lords of the realm under the early kings. Eventually, and up to the Revolution, the *parlements* were legislative assemblies (the most important being the *Parlement* of Paris) charged with advising the monarch on laws, but functioning preferably (from the king's viewpoint) simply to "register" royal edicts and to see that they were carried out. Louis XIV had particular trouble with the *parlements*, especially after they became strongholds of Jansenism in opposition to the royal party of Jesuits. M's point here is that the Regent turned to them immediately for backing and the assurance of the legality of his regency.

193. A santon is a Mohammedan monk; several letters of the *Espion turc* are addressed to a santon.

194. Saint Paul (not the apostle), anchorite in the Theban desert, *ca.* 314. Saint Anthony (251-356), also a Theban anchorite, triumphed over many temptations and became the center of a rich legendary literature (Cf. Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*). Saint Pachomius was the founder of the cenobite community and monastic order also in upper Thebes (200-346).

195. See above, note 66.

196. See above, note 176.

197. M reacts here, as always, against all theories of society presupposing the necessity of a social contract (thus, against Hobbes). He is influenced in this conviction by Leibnitz, and especially, by Shaftesbury, in particular, *The Characteristics.*
198. What M calls here *droit public* is clearly international law in modern terms. I have used "public law" and "international law" interchangeably. Later, in the *Spirit,* M will speak consistently of *droit des gens.* Like his contemporary, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre, M is much influenced by Grotius.
199. Although there can be little doubt that M owes a great deal to Machiavelli's thought, it is just as obvious that he thoroughly detested many of the Italian's doctrines. See Ettore Levi-Malvano, and "Two Forgotten Jurists: Montesquieu and Machiavelli" in *Solicitor's Journal and Weekly Report,* Aug. 27, 1921.
200. In addition to these, the *Spirit* (Bk. 10, Ch. ii) will recognize the right to attack "when a people can see that an extended peace would enable another people to destroy the first and when attack therefore becomes the only means of preventing such destruction."
201. M gets this anecdote from Diodorus of Sicily (I, Ch. xcv). King Ahmose of Egypt broke his alliance with Polycrates, tyrant of Samos (A).
202. M says in the *Spirit* (Bk. 10, Ch. iv): "I define as follows the right of conquest: a necessary, legitimate, and unfortunate right, which always leaves outstanding an immense debt to be paid for acquittal in the eyes of mankind."
203. Visapur, formerly (until 1686) an independent realm, is a state in western Hindustan.
204. Mazanderan is a Persian province to the south of the Caspian Sea.
205. Jaron, or Djaroun, is a Persian city close to a precipitous mountain.
206. The two laws are at the center of Cartesian physics. M may have been influenced in expression in this letter by the *Entretien* of Fontenelle (A).
207. A dangerous idea for M to express had he not put it into the mouth of his Persian and stated it in reference to the Koran. Even so, the reader is struck—despite the disclaimer of the last paragraph—by the outspoken quality of this otherwise orthodox Persian's remarks.
208. See note 101, above. (A) points out in detail (p.

126, n. 1) the frequent literary use, starting as far back as 1649, of satire against the rich tax farmer.

209. By the edict of March 1716 (revoked in March 1717 —a few days before the date of this letter), the purpose of which was to seek out and punish extortionate tax collectors.

210. Adrien Maurice, Duc de Noailles, President of the Council of Finance from 1715 to 1718.

211. Dufresny (*Amusements*, XI) shows a financier walking into a drawing room and being addressed familiarly (*tu*) by a lackey who has recognized in him an old friend. M's irony here is certainly not impersonal and objective.

212. Chardin (IV, p. 147) had said: "The clothing of Orientals certainly does not follow the style." J. F. Bernard makes styles the subject of his Chapter ix. Cotolendi (*Lettres d'un Sicilien*) and Marana use the same theme (A).

213. Fancy here is taken as the genre of painting, *fantaisie:* see above, note 104.

214. Probably an allusion to the ridiculous coiffures, on which see (A) p. 252, n. 2, that passed back and forth between skyscrapers and bobbed or short. Under these conditions it was difficult to gauge just where milady's waist and mouth line should fall.

215. (Car) recalls here Voltaire's statement in *Les Embellissements de la ville de Cachemire:* "The Kachmirs (Parisians) came to the point of furnishing styles, dances, and cooks for practically the whole of Asia."

216. The Justinian Code and subsequent constitutions collected together with it. According to a theory widely held at the time, these had been freely accepted in the assemblies of the Champs de Mars or Champs de Mai (Car) (Cai). See M, *Spicilège*, *NRF*, II, pp. 1282-3, #210-12.

217. On the complications and uncertainties of French laws, see *Lettre d'un Sicilien*, pp. 37, 43, and 46. On this same point, M will become more conservative in the *Spirit* (Bk. 6, Chs. i and ii): "If you examine the formalities of justice in relation to the difficulty experienced by a citizen in getting back property or receiving satisfaction for some insult, you will no doubt find there are too many; if you look at them in relationship to freedom and the inviolability of citizens, you will many times find there are too few formalities, and you will understand that trouble, expense, long waiting, and even the dangers of justice

are the price each citizen pays for his freedom."

218. Constitution—the papal bull *"Unigenitus."* See above, note 43. Anne Fremantle's *The Papal Encyclicals* contains a readily available text of the bull.
219. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.
220. A favorite idea of M, already sketched in the Troglodyte cycle; it will become a central observation of the *Spirit*.
221. (Car) notes that in the *Spirit* (Bk. 2, Chs. i, iv; Bk. 3, Chs. vii, x; Bk. 4, Ch. ii; Bk. 4, Chs. ix-xii) these are precisely the safeguards brought to bear on absolute rule by custom, religion, and the enlightenment of the prince, all of which constitute the essence of a monarchy. It can be seen that the *PL* demands more: an equal division of power between prince and subjects.
222. M exaggerates here. Chardin does say (VI, pp. 19, 57, 91) that the king has the right of life and death over even the greatest in his state, but he does not say that the prince constantly uses this right. An Oriental grandee in disgrace often loses only his position and title, or all or part of his wealth.
223. The French king is Philip II (1165-1223), and the assassins are the famous Oriental band of "Assassins." After the Third Crusade, the rumor went throughout France that Richard the Lion-Hearted had paid the Assassins (and their chief, the Old Man of the Mountain) to come and kill Philip in Paris. The monk Rigord claims that to protect himself against such a danger, the King started the habit of surrounding himself with guards.
224. See note 176, above, on this recurring idea.
225. A characteristic, promonarchy side of M is visible here. (A) says that M had just read Montrésor's *Mémoires* (II, p. 62), in which there was an account of the trial of the Duc da La Valette. Louis XIII, wishing to be himself the judge, was answered by President de Bellièvre in these terms: *"Que la face du prince, qui porte les grâces, ne peut soutenir cela, que sa vue seule levoit les interdits des églises, qu'on ne devoit sortir que content de devant le prince."* M liked these words very much and used them in *Spirit*, Bk. VI, Ch. v.
226. The *Spirit* (Bk. VIII, Ch. vii) says: "In proportion as the monarch's power grows more immense, his personal security diminishes." For the example of rapid conspiracy probably in M's mind, see the ac-

count of the rebel Mir-Weiss in *Spicilège, NRF,* II, p. 1293. See also, note 342, below.

227. See note 176, above.

228. But see Letters LXXVI and LXXVII. (A) points out that James Tyrrell (1719) had just discussed this problem of whether resistance of a whole nation is natural or a rule or the Gospel (*Bibliotheca politica*).

229. A reference to the declaration of the House of Commons in 1649 upon the opening of the trial of Charles I.

230. *Romans,* XIII, 1: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher Powers."

231. An allusion to Edward IV, who in 1471, at the battle of Tewkesbury, imprisoned Prince Edward, son of Henry VI.

232. This whole passage, with the possible exception of the style, might very well have been inserted in Rousseau's *First Discourse* (1751) without confusing the reader. M's answer to what here seems complete distrust of the arts becomes clear, of course, in the following letter. See also Appendix (p. 284) for continuation of Troglodyte cycle, which has this dilemma as its theme.

233. This whole passage foreshadows Voltaire's early devotion to the benefits of luxury, both from an economic and an aesthetic point of view. Cf., in particular, his *Le Mondain* (1736): "*Le superflu, chose très nécessaire.*" Voltaire may grow more sober on such ideas (cf., article, "*Luxe,*" 1764), but his thinking and M's thinking here clearly derive from English economic thought, and in particular, from Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1714, with additions in 1728). (Car) notes that the *Spirit* (Bk. 8, Chs. i-vii) studies this problem of luxury in more detail and concludes that it is generally necessary to monarchies but dangerous to republics.

234. For example, the Spanish Bourbons had not relinquished their claims to the French throne. The monarch who is described here is the young Louis XV, who was known in his youth as Louis the Well-Beloved.

235. M is obviously thinking of the last years of Louis XIV's reign and Mme de Maintenon and Père Tellier.

236. M exaggerates. It was about 500 years old, having been granted its first privilege in 1200. Tradition, however, dated it back to Charlemagne.

237. He means the quarrel of Ramus (M). This quarrel dates from 1559, when Ramus brought it to the fore in his *Scholae Grammaticae.* (Car) adds: "Allusion to an episode told by Fregius (*Vita Rami*, 24) and used later by Bayle (*Dict.*, IV, 837, note). The professors of the Collège de France, with Ramus at their head, wanted Frenchmen to sound the letter *U* after a *Q*. The Sorbonne opposed them. In 1550 a cleric was stripped of his benefices by the Sorbonne for having adopted Ramus's pronunciation. He appealed to the *Parlement*, and they upheld his case."
238. This was in 1610 (M). (Car) says: "M in his manuscript papers mentions this incident as being taken from a 'fat collection' that Père Desmolets had lent to him, but he dates it rather as 1510." (A) claims it appears both in *Pensées* and *Spicilège.*
239. The memoirs of the Cardinal de Retz had appeared in 1717, and memories of the Fronde were awakened in many minds during the Regency. This without mentioning the flood of memoirs and pseudo memoirs at the end of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th. Saint-Simon was, of course, still writing his.
240. Cardinal Mazarin, an Italian, wishing to say *"Arrêt d'Union"* before the deputies of *Parlement* actually said *"Arrêt d'Oignon";* of this the people made many a joke (M). M's note appears only in the 1722 (1721) edition. Mazarin's original sin, to which M refers later in the letter, was his relationship to the Queen Mother.
241. (Car) notes: "This same idea appears in the *Spirit* (Bk. 23, Ch. xxiv), but it is the Middle Ages that M takes for comparison with the present. Here it is antiquity." (A) adds: "He did not invent this theory, which seems to us today so contrary to the facts. As Damilaville notes in his *Encyclopédie* article *"Population,"* the idea that the human race has suffered great reductions in numbers is already the opinion of Diodorus of Sicily, and of Strabo. Vossius had published a study in 1685 in which he pushed this notion to absurdity. . . . Hubner in his *Géographie* essentially follows Vossius. M adopted these views. His conclusions are taken up later by Robert Wallace in *Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in Ancient and Modern Times* (1753); M directed the French translation of this work. Hume at this date had just put into his *Political Discourses* a chapter on "Popu-

lousness of Ancient Nations." . . . Voltaire was a bitter critic of these ideas. His article "*Population*" in the *Dictionnaire philosophique* can see in M's ideas only a paradox inspired by 'the itch to be witty.'"

242. The same idea appears in Chardin, VI, p. 235, and IX, p. 136. On the depopulation of Spain, see also *Spicilège, NRF*, II, pp. 1434-5, #786-9.
243. As has been seen above (note 241), there is a gross exaggeration in M's estimate. It would seem from other writings, however, that he gives it seriously.
244. This pestilence was the plague of 1348.
245. M refers to venereal disease, whose provenance was widely discussed and disputed during the century. See *Pensées, NRF*, I, p. 1070 (note), where M thinks he proves that the disease was nonexistent in antiquity.
246. M bases himself here very clearly and in detail on Marana (A), p. 287.
247. This passage can be compared to ideas of the *Espion turc* (III, Lett. 5): "God possesses the same infinite power from all eternity, the same wisdom and goodness that he has had for five or six thousand years. Who, therefore, prevented him from exercising his divine attributes earlier? What reason can he have had for waiting so long to draw this glorious creation from the bosom of the void?"
248. Koran, II, 187: "It is made lawful for you to go unto your wives on the night of the fast. They are raiment for you, and ye are raiment for them. Allah is aware that ye were deceiving yourselves in this respect, and he hath turned in mercy toward you and relieved you."
249. Koran, II, 223: "Your women are a tilth for you [to cultivate], so go to your tilth as ye will and send [good deeds] before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that you will one day meet him." M's translation seems somewhat inaccurate.
250. M exaggerates. Chardin says (VI, 246): "The number of eunuchs in the house of the very grandest lords is usually from six to eight. In the houses of lesser lords there are three or four, and in the houses of those who are only wealthy, with no rank, there are a couple."
251. This idea that the propagation of the species is not favored by polygamy can be found in Chardin, VI, pp. 235-6, and in Rycaut Bk. 2, Ch. xxi, pp. 367-8.

252. Chardin (II, p. 259) says: "The Persians are incapable of understanding that there should exist people who live in chastity by choice and voluntarily."
253. The *Espion turc* (V, Lett. 12) also finds it strange and contradictory that priests should recommend "marriage to lay members as a sacred sacrament and mystery of religion" and not marry, themselves.
254. Sixteen, according to the canons of the Council of Trent and the Ruling of Blois in May 1579 (Car).
255. Cf. *Spirit* (Bk. 14, Ch. vii) for M's discussion of unhappy social effects of monasticism. For a stronger treatment in fiction, see Diderot's *La Religieuse.*
256. Reference to the law *Julia et Poppia Poppaea* passed under Augustus. M analyzes it at length in *Spirit* (Bk. 23, Ch. xxi). The law granted honors to those with three children and punished bachelors and childless men with civil limitations.
257. Obvious reference to popular charges brought by the church against the reformers and in particular against Martin Luther.
258. Cf. *Spirit* (Bk. 25, Chs. v, vi). The *Espion turc* (A) is crueller toward monks: "I cannot conceive by what policy encouragement is given to so many nurseries of spiritual blood-suckers who serve only to suck up the last drop of this nation's blood."
259. This same idea is in Chardin (IX, p. 136) and will appear again in *Spirit,* Bk. 24, Ch. xi. See also Jackson, p. 373.
260. For the Chinese, *tien* is the name both of heaven and of the supreme divinity. Cf., M, *Geographica,* fo. 82: "They look upon the tien as the soul of the world, or the world itself; this soul acts necessarily, is fatally determined, and in like manner, determines." See Masson *"Un chinois. . . ."*
261. On the contemplative character of Moslem Persians, see Chardin, IV, p. 99, and IX, p. 136.
262. Here the allusion is probably to facts reported by Flacourt (Ch. xxix, pp. 91-3). However, Flacourt attributes the practice of abortion only to unmarried women who want to avoid loss of honor (Car).
263. A reference to an edict of Henry II, February 1556. See *Spirit,* Bk. 26, Ch. iii, for M's feeling as to the injustice of this edict.
264. This whole paragraph was added for the first time in 1754. (Cai) notes that it takes up again an idea in the *Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les Esprits et les Caractères* (*NRF,* II, p. 39). This

rather vague idea, with extravagant overtones, was one that interested M in the extreme; in the *Spirit*, climate has become one of the determinants of law. See Mercier, "*La théorie des climats. . . .*"

265. A province near Mazanderan, to the south of the Caspian Sea.
266. Tavernier (*Six voyages*, I, Bk. 4, Ch. i, pp. 369–70) reports: "Of these twenty thousand families there are scarcely three thousand left today."
267. The author is referring perhaps to the Isle of Bourbon (M). Flacourt (Ch. xxxviii) speaks of some sick Frenchmen who were left on the Isle of Bourbon and promptly recovered their health there.
268. M is referring to the French enclaves in India of which there is much talk in the 18th century as good places to make a rapid fortune. Some of these enclaves (all ceded back to India in the 1950's) are Pondichéry (1674), Chandernagor (1688), Karikal (*ca.* 1740).
269. There are similar strong feelings in *Considérations*, Ch. vi, and *Spirit*, Bk. 10, Ch. iv; Bk. 15, Ch. iv; Bk. 23, Ch. xi; Bk. 26, Ch. xxii, and *Pensées*, *NRF*, I, p. 1380. ("We have shown in the *Persian Letters* the vanity of the pretexts that forced the Spanish to go to such extremes.")
270. This reference, which must come from M's readings in Latin historians, has not been traced.
271. Cf. *Spirit*, Bk. 23, Ch. xi, for the nefarious effect of governmental despotism on population.
272. The ruling of November 29, 1688, and the ordinance of January 26, 1701, excused married men from service in the militia.
273. Prince Eugene of Savoy's capture of Timisoara in 1716 and of Belgrade in 1717.
274. This is the Cardinal Alberoni. In order to combat the Empire, he came to an understanding with Turkey. In this way, his operations in Sardinia and Sicily forced the Viennese government to reduce their forces on the Danube.
275. Prince Eugene of Savoy is the grand vizier of Germany; he commanded the Imperial armies against Turkey. Omar is the second of Mohammed's illegal successors for the Persians who, being Shiite, claim Ali as legitimate successor in opposition to the Turks.
276. Tavernier (*Six voyages*, II, Bk. 3, Ch. viii, p. 384) says: "A woman cannot burn herself along with her

husband's body without the permission of the governor of the place where she dwells. These governors, who are Mohammedans and who detest this execrable custom . . . , do not give their permission easily."

277. Bonzes are Buddhist priests, monks whom M seems to confuse with Brahmans (Car).

278. This anecdote, which was not new with M, will be used again in the century, in particular in Voltaire's *Zadig*.

279. An allusion to Cellamare's conspiracy. Antoine de Cellamare (1657-1733), a Spanish diplomat born in Naples, was ambassador to the French court. In conspiring with Alberoni against the Regent, he was arrested and taken to the frontier. The Duc de Maine (Louis XIV's bastard) was arrested on December 29 and taken to Doulens fortress, and his wife (ever an active instigator) was sent to the chateau of Dijon.

280. M says in *Pensées*, *NRF*, I, p. 977: "I have never seen tears flow without being touched." The rest of the century will elevate such tendencies into a virtue. E.g., the *"comédie larmoyante"* and many pages of Diderot's letters.

281. (Car) suggests that Darius III is meant here. After the battle of Arbela he said to those about him: "Your faithfulness and fidelity make me believe that I am still king." Quintus Curtius, V, 8.

282. King Charles XII of Sweden, was killed at Frederikshald on November 30, 1718. The minister is Heinrich von Schlitz, Baron von Goertz, executed in 1719. Details can be found in Voltaire's *Histoire de Charles XII*. However, modern historians do not agree with M's sympathy for Charles and his contempt for Goertz. In general, contemporary opinion shared M's feeling that Goertz had been rightfully punished by the confused Swedish people.

283. The fortress of Fuenterrabia fell to Berwick on July 18, 1719.

284. M will clarify this passage in *Spirit* (Preface, and Bk. I, Ch. i). He will insist that laws are the expression of "necessary relationships deriving from the nature of things" rather than the result of prejudice and fancy. Thus these legislators here do not understand what law is, let alone make good laws.

285. This early idea of M will not be greatly changed later. See p. 332, note 287. Such thinking is taken up by others; by Diderot with perhaps more insistence

on the necessity to change the law, but with the same respect for gradualism and respect, e.g., *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*.

286. Again the leitmotiv of M; see above, note 176.
287. Cf. a different idea in the *Spirit*, Bk. 5, Ch. vii: "The laws of Rome, which had accustomed youth to dependency, established a long minority. We were perhaps wrong to take over that custom. In a monarchy, so much restraint is unnecessary."
288. Dufresny already had considered the literary and news columnists as among "the insects" that made the Tuileries gardens uncomfortable (*Amusements*, VI).
289. 1717 (M). War was declared in July, 1716.
290. The Spanish landed on Sardinia on August 22, 1717. Alberoni sent his fleet to Sicily in July 1718.
291. The Count of Lionne, according to Saint-Simon, a great friend of the *nouvellistes*. He died in 1716.
292. M refers to Rehoboam in I Kings, 8 ff., where the young men urge the King to speak as follows to the people: "And now whereas my father laid upon you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."
293. The Jardin du Roi, now the Jardin des Plantes, was founded in 1616, passed through many vicissitudes, and finally, became a famous scientific landmark in Europe, particularly under the enterprise of Buffon (*ca.* 1739). (A) points out that the *nouvellistes* had been a fertile subject for satirists since 1660: Donneau de Visé described them in his *Nouvelles nouvelles* (1663) and in *Mercure Galant* (1673); La Bruyère, in *Caractères;* they appear in *Grand théâtre des nouvellistes* (1689), in Mme de Gomez de Vasconcelle's *La Galant Nouvelliste* (1703), in the *Nouveau Règlement général pour les Nouvellistes*, and in Abbé Pic's *Les Nouvellistes* (1711).
294. This somewhat exaggerated idea is in Chardin, III, pp. 212-13.
295. In his general outline, M is reasonably accurate about matters that recent archeology has made clearer. The basic cycle of the Troglodytes is visible here.
296. M insists again on one of his favorite points, made clearer now by intervening research and scholarship on the period, i.e., that the principle of monarchy did not grow directly out of the ruins of the Roman Empire.

297. A clearer conception of the barbaric or Gothic government as being the origin of modern monarchies is developed at length in *Spirit* (Bk. 11, Ch. viii; Bks. 28, 30, and 31). "The ancients had no clear idea of monarchy."
298. Allusion is made by the speaker to the monetary crisis caused by the system of John Law (see below, note 317). The worst crisis came in 1720. In order to restore some value to the bank notes, a public declaration stated that gold would be withdrawn from circulation on May 1 and silver would be withdrawn at the end of the year.
299. Since specie payment was to be outlawed, debtors hastened to pay their creditors with depreciating bank notes, which by law, were to be accepted at par. See Mathieu Marais, *Journal*, 25 Sept., 1720. Marais, incidentally, was M's rival for the Academy seat.
300. In 1719, Prince Pio de Savoia (y Corte Real) was commanding the Spanish army against Berwick. He did not enter Languedoc.
301. The famous library of Saint Victor Abbey, opened to the public in 1707.
302. On this point, see Chardin, V, pp. 76 ff. (Car), and II, p. 288, and VI, p. 83 (A).
303. M refers here especially to John Law (see below, note 317), although the reference need not be considered so restrictive.
304. See above, note 297. M is here clearer about the formation of the empire out of ancient monarchies. (A) notes that the defenders of aristocracy as an institution (Abbé Le Laboureur, Saint-Simon, Boulainvilliers) saw the history of France as a succession of encroachments made by the royal house on ancient Germanic or Frankish liberties possessed naturally by the aristocracy.
305. This is Fontenelle's theory in *Discours sur la nature de l'Eglogue*, 1688 (Car). M is extremely cruel here to all literature that might be called creative and imaginative. He is justified only in part by the bad contemporary examples he knew for lyric poetry and the novel. M will make the revealing statement that for him the greatest poets are Plato, Malebranche, Shaftesbury, and Montaigne.
306. The successive administrations of the Duc de Noailles, the Duc d'Argenson, John Law, and Pâris du

Verney. Cf., *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle*, *NRF*, II, p. 37.

307. After the growing dissatisfaction with one-man (secretary of state) rule under Louis XIV, the Regent formed councils. (A) notes that in February 1716, thinking people began to feel "this sort of government cannot exist in France" (*Journal de la Régence*, p. 66). In September 1718, the councils were eliminated. M, agreeing with the Abbé Saint-Pierre, finds the experiment not as stupid as do the majority of Frenchmen.
308. The Duc de Noailles.
309. The certain street is the rue Quincampoix, where Law's offices were located; it became a busy center of speculation and the scene of unbelievable intrigue. For an example of the extent to which nobles and their ladies were capable of fawning upon Law for financial reasons, see *Spicilège*, *NRF*, II, p. 1298, #293-4.
310. This whole letter is a bitter indictment of John Law and his system (see below, note 317). M, who in the *Letters* is exceedingly bitter and cruel to Law, will later (August 29, 1728) meet him in Venice and will then report at length on Law's financial theories, concluding: "He is a cunning man, not without judgment, whose whole game is to turn your reply back against you by finding some flaw in it; otherwise, he is fonder of his ideas than of his own pocketbook." *Voyages*, *NRF*, I, pp. 571-4. There is an incident of a lackey turned rich man in Dufresny, *Amusements*, XI.
311. Reference to Ulrika Eleonora, sister of Charles XII. She abdicated in favor of her consort, Frederick von Hesse-Cassel, in February 1720 (A), probably less out of conjugal fervor than from a sense of her inadequacy to deal with problems of state.
312. Reference to the friendship between Descartes and Christina. Descartes died (1650) at her court, where he was, at the Queen's invitation, philosopher in residence.
313. The Paris *Parlement* was exiled to Pontoise on July 21, 1720, for having refused to record a decree of the Council retiring two hundred million francs in bank notes. Despite the *Parlement's* refusal, the decree was carried out.
314. There is another commendation of the *parlements* in the *Spirit*, Bk. 5, Ch. x: "The body charged with

recording laws never obeys better than when it obeys slowly, and brings to bear on the prince's affairs that kind of reflection which is hardly to be expected either from the court's blindness on state laws or from the overhastiness of its counsel."

315. This name turns up in Chardin as that of the minister of Shah Suleiman.

316. Chardin (VII, p. 59) had said that Mohammedanism does not exclude women from celestial reward, but rather, that it assigns a special paradise to them. For comment on probable influences on M as he concocted this Oriental tale, see (A) pp. 365-6.

317. This long myth is a barely disguised story of the life and exploits of John Law, for whom M felt at this time, only contempt—albeit a somewhat admiring contempt. Myth fits well with Law, whose life reads more like a novel than many of the extravagant novels of the day. Law (1671-1729), born in Scotland of good family, sowed wild oats in London, killed a man, made a rapid marriage with a strong-willed woman, studied banking in Belgium, and (1705) before arriving in France, proposed in vain the establishment of a national bank in Scotland. In a sense, his life is that of an adventurer and an idealist (with but one idea—credit and paper money) in eternal migration toward a country sympathetic enough to buy his ideas and personality. Because of the crucial state of French affairs after Louis XIV's death, Law finally found a sympathetic ear in the Regent and was able to establish a royal bank issuing notes guaranteed by the King. Later the national bank became a kind of stock-company enterprise, or holding company, with stock being issued for the development of Louisiana (Law's undertaking was called the "Mississippi Bubble"), and later, for East Indian development. Speculation rose to a frenzy, and the last years of the "Law affair" saw a series of decrees issued by the still-trusting Regent (this despite reasonable opposition, as well as opposition aroused by personal animosity) which, manipulated gold, silver, and stock or bank-note ratios in a futile attempt to save France from the inevitable crash that followed upon a too liberal watering of stock by Law, whose enthusiasm and trust in the future knew no bounds. A good part of the blame must go to the unscrupulous great of France, who were willing to make an easy killing but

not to work hard at the patient development of very real resources possessed by France in the New World. H. M. Hyde (pp. 144-5) sums up Law's case rather well: "His great mistake was that he pushed forward his ideas too quickly for the country, while his encouragement of speculation, though it was inspired by perfectly honest motives, became a snowball the movements of which he eventually found himself unable to control." See also Perkins, Chs. xiii, xiv, and xv. M is perfectly correct in seeing the Law affair as the most serious and indicative event of the Regency. See above, note 310, and his remarks on Law and finance in *Spicilège, NRF*, II, pp. 1298 and 1383 ff. Also *Spicilège* (*NRF*, II, p. 1311) for M's idea as to how Law should have settled Louisiana *through* Canada.

318. According to Chardin (II, pp. 288-9) a belief in amulets is very common among the Persians: "They make them up of passages from the Koran and from the Hadith, which are sayings of Mohammed's first successors and prayers of their saints intermixed with cabalistic terms. . . . They wear them around their necks and on their belts but most usually on their arms between elbow and shoulder in little bags made of silk or figured brocade, about as big as a demi-écu, more or less. . . . I have seen some people carry in this fashion the whole of the Koran."
319. All commentators suggest *Connaissance du Globe.*
320. R.J.F.—Reverend Jesuit Father.
321. *La Cour sainte ou Institution chrétienne des Grands* by the Jesuit Caussin (1627). Père Rodriguez (1526-1616), a Spanish Jesuit, was one of the foremost ascetics of the classic period.
322. See Appendix for continuation of this somewhat irreverently written letter, which M suppressed in his last revision (basis of the edition of 1758).
323. On this indiscriminate accusation of atheism, see also *Pensées, NRF*, I, p. 1541, #2072: "I don't know how it happens that you can't form a word-system without being immediately accused of atheism."
324. M is still whipping John Law. (A) quotes some details from E. Levasseur, *Recherches historiques sur le système de Law.* E.g., the bishop of Castres writes: "An end to commerce, an end to work, an end to trust, no more hope in industry (which is to say: activity), nor in friendship, nor in charity itself."
325. The "oak leaves" are shares of Law's stock. The

paragraph refers to payment in depreciated paper bank notes, to which M has already referred.

326. (Car) notes Mathieu Marais, *Journal*, Sept. 25, 1720 (I, p. 453): "Brother is armed against brother, father against son, and men no longer recognize each other."

327. This rather strong paragraph marks the final revenge of the eunuch of his society, a revenge hinted at throughout the *PL*.

328. These two apologies are found in the manuscript thoughts of M. They are entitled respectively: *Lettres persanes*, and *Apologie des Lettres persanes*.

329. This fragment and the following ones (except the last) are taken from the manuscript *Pensées* of M (first published 1899-1901) who headed them with the notation "Fragments of old materials for *The Persian Letters*." There is a note by M: "I have thrown away the others or used them elsewhere."

330. A manuscript of the *Spirit*, preserved at La Brède, contains an even livelier draft of this letter; M later gave up the idea of using this fiction.

331. The Foreigner is, of course, John Law. The decree is that of May 21, 1720, reducing the value of paper notes by half; M referred to it in Letter CXLII. This fragment and that which follows are, as (A) points out, in reality, one letter plus a postscript.

332. A decree of May 27, 1720, revoked the decree of May 21.

333. The cardinal's hat was coveted by Dubois. See what M has to say of him in *Spicilège*, *NRF*, II, pp. 1382 and 1422; also *Pensées*, *NRF*, I, p. 1124. See also, for important political role of Dubois, Perkins (Ch. xvi), who says of him: "In speech as well as in character, Dubois had something of Gil Blas." Dubois was minister from 1717 to 1721.

334. I had thought of continuing the history of the Troglodytes, and this was my idea for it (M).

335. This letter could not be put into the *Persian Letters:* first, because it is too much like some others, and second, because it only repeats what was better expressed there. I am putting it here because of certain fragments that I shall perhaps be able to draw from it and because of some lively spots in it (M). The end of this letter was used by M in Letter XV and in Letter XXII; both were first published in 1754. Janum becomes Jaron in final text.

336. M does not distinguish here between Rebiab I and Rebiab II, an infrequent slip.
337. Chardin (II, p. 272) says that Persians "rarely make use of the wide freedom they have to break a marriage. The bourgeois class sometimes does, but the well-born would rather die than repudiate their wives."
338. Make a single letter of these two (M); that is, this fragment and the one that follows it.
339. Asper—small denomination of Turkish money.
340. This triple progression, from gods to heroes to men, is very probably an echo of M's reading of Vico's *Nuova Scienza;* it at least shows how very close the thinking of M comes at times to that of the Italian, even though their final historical view differs in important ways. M refers to this idea again both in *Pensées* and in *Spicilège*. For a sound discussion of M and Vico as interpreters of history, see Jules Chaix-Ruy.
341. M is referring to Spinoza (generally accused of atheism in the 18th century) in contrast to much of traditional Christian theology on the immanence of God. M's attitude toward Spinoza (frequent entries in *Pensées* and *Spicilège* refer to him) is ambivalent, like that of many other 18th-century thinkers. See Paul Vernière.
342. Mir-Vais (written Mevis and Myrr-Weiss by M) was a chief of the tribe of Ghibzais, which rose up against Shah Hussein Mirza. The first important event of the civil war was the siege of Kandahar (see Letter LV) in 1713. Mir-Vais continued to gain ground until his death. His successor, Mahmoud, marched on Ispahan and won a decisive battle in 1722. The Shah capitulated. M mentions him in several other places: e.g., *Spicilège*, *NRF*, II, p. 1293; *Pensées*, *NRF*, I, p. 1436, #1823.
343. Decrees of the Council.
344. The Bull and Constitution of the Jesuits. Another possibility given by commentators: Banques and Companies of the Indies.
345. (Car) says: "perhaps Fléchier, Monsieur [Monseigneur?] de Nîmes. He was bishop from 1678 to 1710."
346. French Jesuits. Some early commentators write *jeux floraux*.
347. Maimbourg (1620-1686), author of several histor-

ical works, was excluded from Jesuit order for his defense of Gallican Liberties.

348. These are terms used by Aquinas: e.g., "Question XLVII ff."

349. Father Quesnel, famous Jansenist, condemned by the papal bull "*Unigenitus*" (see above, note 43); Father Lallemant (d. 1748), a Jesuit and an ardent upholder of the bull, author of a book against Quesnel (1704).

350. The names of several of the most famous casuists can be recognized here: Molina, Escobar, Vasques, Bauny, Tamburini.

351. M facetiously compares Aretino (1492-1557), the author of *Sonetti lussuriosi*, whose figures were taken by the 17th century as the very symbol of concupiscence, and Père Sanchez (1550-1610), who in *Disputationes de sancto matrimonio* comments on secrets of the wedding alcove with a precision that is astonishing for a monk (AB).

TEXTUAL NOTES

In this section, variant editions of *The Persian Letters* are referred to as follows: A, B, C, and D indicate the editions of 1721, 1722 (1721), 1754, and 1758 respectively; E indicates the edition compiled by Barckhausen (1897, 1913) after study of Montesquieu's notebooks at La Brède. Entries are indicated on any given page with an asterisk and are identified below by the number of that page and the key word or words immediately preceding the asterisk.

37 *Letters (1754)* The Reflections first appeared in C. A first draft, entitled Preface of the Publisher, was discovered at La Brède. This is referred to here as Preface.

39 *find* Preface has: "What constitutes the principal worth of *The Persian Letters* is that one can find in them. . . ."

39 *success* Preface continues: "of *Pamela* and *The Peruvian Letters* (charming works that have been published since)."

39 *actors* Preface continues: "are not chosen, but forced, and where all the subjects. . . ."

39 *publishers* Preface has here: "the Dutch publishers."

39 *there are* Preface adds: "in the first letters."

40 *Europe* Preface omits: "in, as it were, another universe."

40 *criticism* From here to "are perceived" (next paragraph), M had originally written, in first draft: "I shall even admit that I should have done as well to write a less good book than to touch upon these matters, for a man is never so sure of the way in which others are affected as of the way in which he is affected himself."

40 *area* From this point on, Preface differs perceptibly from the Reflections. The text follows (for more detailed variants between first version of Preface and corrections, see Adam, pp. 5-6):

"The reader is begged to note that these effects are always linked with the feeling of surprise and astonishment, never with an idea of critical examination, even less, of criticism. Speaking of our religion, these Persians should not have appeared more advised than when speaking of ordinary customs and usages of the nation; and if they sometimes find our dogmas strange, it can be seen that this strangeness is, in *The Persian Letters,* stamped in such a way as to be based upon nothing other than their utter ignorance of the chain that binds these dogmas to our other truths. The whole charm consists solely in the contrast that obtains between real things and the way in which they are perceived.

"And if these reasons do nothing to excuse the author, he will at least have the consolation of thinking that those who come after him will learn from his example that the slightest errors of this nature are irreparable. [Paragraph in first draft only.]

"Of all the editions of this book, only the first is good: it did not suffer the temerity of booksellers. It appeared in 1721, printed in Cologne by Pierre Marteau. The edition published herewith earns preference because in several places of this edition the style and some typographical errors that slipped into the printing are corrected. Such errors were endlessly multiplied in succeeding editions because the work was abandoned by its author at birth."

40 *new* The editions of 1754 and 1758 printed *"naïve"* here. Barckhausen corrected it from the text of notebooks to *"neuve."* Adam holds to the first reading.

44 *bored* Text B (second edition, marked *"1721, chez Brunel"*) reads here "sent" in place of "bored." Adam holds to "sent," which he says is obvious.

45 *Nation* The original reading "the Nation" was changed to "our nation" or "the French nation" by M's notebooks.

47 *Letter I* Missing in B.

48 *1711* B has: "From Erzerum, the 10th of the Moon of Rebiab II, 1711."

50 *Letter V* Missing in B.

51 *Letter VI* This is the first letter of B.

53 *glean* ABC have: "obtain from our temperament what. . . ."

55 *20th* B has: "the 1st."

58 *Letter X* Missing in B.

59 *for me* B replaces the first paragraph with: "You ask me whether men are happy by reason of their pleasure and satisfaction of the senses, or by their practice of virtue. You want me to explain what you have heard me say sometimes to the effect that men are born to be virtuous and that justice is a quality as much a part of them as existence itself.

"If you were to consult the mullahs, they would overwhelm you with passages of the Holy Koran, without realizing that you are not talking to them as a true believer, but rather, as man, citizen, and father of a family."

This is essentially the text of Letter X, missing in B.

63 *customs* B has: "hearts."

67 *Letter XV* This letter appears for the first time in Supplement of C.

67 *Letter XVI* Missing in B.

75 *Letter XXII* Appears for the first time in Supplement of C.

75 *Ispahan* Place notation added by E.

78 *that three are only one* B omits these words.

79 *Letter XXV* Missing in B.

82 *go that far* ABC have instead: "carry the crime so far."

84 *another* ABC have: "Now another, with lively eyes and impassioned look. . . ."

86 *and Germany* ABC have instead: "for Spain and Italy."

89 *Letter XXXII* Missing in B.

91 *Ibben* AB have: "Rica to Ibben"—in many ways more indicated by the tone of the letter.

97 *do* CD carry here misprint of *"sont"* for *"font."*

98 *the woman* AC have: "the nature of woman should cease."

98 *the man* AC have: "the virile member."

100 *When I see* B has: "the peoples of the Mogul rush en masse to see their king. . . ."

100 *Letter XLI* Missing in B.

101 *Letter XLII* Missing in B.

102 *Letter XLIII* Missing in B.

102 *forbid them to* AC have: "lay a hand on you."

103 *Usbek* A has: "Rhedi to Usbek."

104 *pay out or transfer any funds* *"Déplacer."* Unusual verb here; a legal form meaning to pick up something from one place to carry it to another.

104 *he said* ABC have: *"me dit-il,"* instead of *"Moi, dit-il."*

106 *Letter XLVII* Missing in B.

108 *study* E has: "examine." ABC add: "according to my custom."

108 *who* ABC have: "and whose characters. . . ."

112 *who* ABC have: "who will scold a bit."

112 *hair* B has: "hair of destroying me."

115 *thousand* ABC have: "two thousand."
116 *house* M's note (see note 108) missing in ABC.
120 *escape it* AC have: "as if I had done it on purpose."
122 *self-evident* "*Plénier*"—"complete, entire" (Gascon usage); "which goes with saying" (Caillois).
124 *18th* Adam has here "10th," with a note that AB have "18th." All commentators, including Adam, read "18th."
126 *man* ABC add: "like you."
127 *interpreters of Holy Writ* The expression used is "*gens de loi,*" which refers in general to lawyers. The suggestion of Caillois that by the Law, M means the Koran, is followed here.
131 *fanatic* ABC add: "and a fool."
136 *the pleasure* AC have: "the pleasure of having me harass them through their paces and lead. . . ."
136 *involved* AC omit the rest of this sentence.
144 *surprise* ABC replace the next two sentences by: "We had to do everything, she and I."
149 *likely to be* Only E has "*seroit*" instead of "*est.*"
149 *to it* E omits this first sentence and starts the next sentence: "According to them."
149 *God* E has: "They believe that God. . . ."
150 *am trying* E has: "that these doctors are trying. . . ."
150 *Koran* E has: "It would appear that the Koran. . . ."
150 *seems* E has: "God seems willing to be without. . . ."
150 *fruit* E has after "fruit": "But could a being who is supposed to know the future dispositions of the soul put conditions on his favors?"
150 *favors* E deletes: "without making them ludicrous."
150 *tomans* ABC have: "a thousand écus."
150 *Rhedi* AB omit this whole last paragraph; it appears first in 1754.
151 *Letter LXX* Missing in B.
151 *Soliman agreed* AC have: "They made Soliman agree."
152 *Letter LXXI* Missing in B.
152 *truth* E has: "truth; our doctors give. . . ."
152 *established* E has: "in the books of their ancient lawgiver." The rest of the sentence is dropped.
154 *Rica* ABC have: "Rica to Usbek," with necessary corresponding corrections throughout the letter.
158 *earths* CD have here: "*têtes*" (heads), a possible reading, which Adam prefers.
158 *Letter LXXVII* This letter is missing in A and B. It constitutes the third letter of the Supplement in C. Barckhausen says that M thought at first of putting this refutation in the mouth of Usbek himself and of making it the final paragraph of the preceding letter. Two drafts for rewriting the paragraph can be found in M's notebooks of corrections; they are substantially the same as this Letter LXXVII. In the large notebook of corrections, M writes: "(page 15) After the last paragraph of the letter that finishes 'his knowledge,' add the following, which will end the letter." Then follows this paragraph, crossed out later by M:

"All these things I have just said, my dear Ibben, are paradoxes that (I believe) will not hold up under the reasoning I am now going to develop for you. Since the Supreme Being has united our souls with our bodies, the composed creature has always a secret horror of separating these two simple beings: this feeling is a branch of natural law. If men live in society, and if this feeling foresees the consequences of the boldness of a man who, master of his own life, would soon become master of the lives of others, then the feeling will become a civil law. If men have a religion, and if this feeling represents more our

dependency on the Creator than the mastery we shall take over ourselves, then it will also be a religious law."

M then writes the following draft, found in both notebooks but crossed out in the large one:

"My dear Ibben, I fear that my philosophy has carried me too far. Listen to this bit of reasoning. If a being is composed of two beings, and if the necessity of preserving this union indicates more a dependency on the Creator, a religious law could have been made from it. If that necessity to preserve the union is a better guaranty of life's actions, a civil law could have been made from it. If the composed being has always a secret horror of separating the two simple beings, that feeling can be regarded as a branch of natural law."

159 *pride* ABC have: "vanity."

159 *talk* Carcassonne has here *"faire jouer";* Caillois and Adam have *"faire jurer."*

160 *they allow* ABC have for this paragraph:

"They know better than all others the weakness of women; they do not want their heels to be seen, nor do they choose to have their toes taken by surprise; they are aware that imagination works steadily ahead; that nothing is amusing to it along the way; it arrives where it was headed, and in this matter, one is always forewarned."

160 *ports* D has: "bridges." Barckhausen, Carcassonne, and Caillois have: "ports." Adam has: "bridges."

160 *unknown* ABC: M's note is missing.

161 *Usbek* DE have: "The grand black eunuch to Usbek."

162 *government was* ABC have: "I have often taken thought within myself to know which, of all governments was. . . ."

162 *one is* ABC have: "where one lives."

164 *some* ABC have: "almost all."

166 *about* ABC have: "our life, our wealth, and our honor."

168 *battle* ABC have: "three battles."

168 *that people* ABC have: "that hard-working people."

170 *opinion* This first phrase is missing in AC.

171 *said that* ABC do not have: "it is said that."

172 *congratulations* AC have: "solicitations."

176 *Letter XCI* Missing in AB.

177 *birth* Carcassonne has *"naissance"* here; Caillois, *"puissance."*

177 *temple* Carcassonne and Adam have *"temple";* Caillois, *"temps."*

182 *despair* In AB, the three preceding paragraphs are replaced by:

"The right of conquest is not a right. A society can be founded only upon the consent of its associates. If it is destroyed by conquest, the people regain their freedom: there is no new society formed, and if the conqueror tries to form one, this is tyranny.

"As to peace treaties, they are never valid when they demand concessions or reparations greater than the damage caused. Otherwise, there is violence, pure and simple, which the people are always free to abrogate, unless in their attempt to recoup what they have lost, they are forced to use such violent measures that there arises an evil greater than the profit they should draw therefrom."

The new text appeared first in the Supplement of C.

183 *a part* ABC have: "they perform about half of our task."

184 *consequences* ABC add here: "as I shall demonstrate to you in a special letter."

185 *as many* ABC have: "more marvels and more miracles than. . . ."

185 *Koran* ABC have: "In our Holy Books."

186 *misfortune* AB have: *"de fortune."*

187 *jesters* ABC have: "the critic."
189 *excess* ABC omit: "to an excess."
190 *some* ABC have: "most."
190 *difficult* ABC have: "impossible."
190 *pure state* ABC omit: "in a pure state."
196 *the 2nd* AB have: "the 2nd." Adam prints "the 5th," but agrees the date is the 2nd.
197 *have to be* ABC have: "are."
198 *one of the most miserable* ABC have: "the most miserable."
198 *You would* ABC have instead: "This circulation of wealth and this progression of revenue, which stems from the mutual dependence of the arts, would cease completely; each man would draw income only from his land and would have just exactly what he needed."
199 *twentieth* ABC have: "the hundreth part of the revenue of a kingdom."
199 *the twentieth* ABC have: "the hundreth."
202 *procedures* ABC have: "*formalités*," instead of "*vains usages*."
204 *Letter CXI* Missing in A.
204 *Usbek to* ——— B assigns this letter to Rica, not Usbek.
204 *setback* B has from the beginning of the letter to this point:

"The people is an animal that sees, hears, and never thinks. It is either in a lethargy or an amazing transport, and it shuttles back and forth endlessly between these two states, without ever knowing whence it has come. I have heard talk in France about a certain governor of Normandy, who, wishing to appear more important at court, would from time to time precipitate on his own initiative popular insurrections, which he then rapidly quelled.

"He confessed that the strongest such insurrection had cost him, all things considered, only one half a toman. He would bring together into a cabaret a collection of rabble, who would then set the tone for the whole city, and afterwards, the whole province.

"This makes me think of a letter written during the recent troubles in Paris, by one of the generals of that city to one of his friends: 'I had the city troops called out three days ago. But they were repelled with losses. However, I count on making up for that setback easily.' "

204 *people* B has: "populace."
204 *we shall* B has: "it has been resolved in the Council to."
204 *hanged* B adds here: "and however little the circumstances justify it, we shall snatch the occasion to order the engraver to put him to the wheel."
204 *pronunciation* Only B carries M's note.
204 *make of* B has: "After that, you be the judge as to whether the people are justified in rising up and making of. . . ."
204 *defeat* B omits: "Since our defeat."
204 *catcalls* B omits this last paragraph.
204 *Shahban* B has: "the 9th of the Moon of Zilcade, 1715."
205 *great* ABC have: "the greatest."
206 *fiftieth* ABC have: "the two hundreth part."
206 *tenth* ABC have: "the fiftieth part."
206 *ancient times* ABC have: "the time of Caesar."
208 *who* ABC up to here have: "Are those who know nature and have a reasonable idea of God able to."
208 *Nonetheless* M: "In preceding editions [i.e., ABC], the reading was: 'And so we need not try to count the age of the world: the number of grains of sand in the ocean is not more than one instant in comparison.' "
208 *think* Text of all editions changed according to notebook of

1754 carry: "Is it not natural to think. . . ." Barckhausen and Caillois have: "These philosophers think. . . ."

208 *may be* This last paragraph missing in AB, and in Supplement of C.

211 *banking* Carcassonne has: "*faisoit valoir la banque.*" Caillois and Adam have: "*faisoit la banque.*"

215 *equality* ABC continue: "and today the scales start to tip to their side. This advantage will grow from day to day; the Protestants will become richer."

216 *more* ABC have: "ten times more."

219 *new bent* This paragraph, missing in AB, first appears in the Supplement of C. Caillois remarks that it takes up again an idea of *Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits.*

219 *climate* ABC have only: "the nature of the climate."

224 *Letter CXXIV* Missing in A.

224 *Rhedi* B has: "Usbek to ——."

225 *year* B adds: "with their friends."

225 *Shalval, 1718* B has: "the 11th of the Moon of Zilcade, 1715."

231 *Letter CXXIX* This letter came earlier in the first three editions; it was Letter LXXVI in A and C, Letter LXVI in B.

236 *injustice* ABC add here: "It would seem that liberty was made to fit the genius of European peoples, and servitude, to fit Asiatic peoples. The Romans offered the Cappadocians this sacred treasure all in vain, for that cowardly nation refused it and fled into servitude with the same eagerness with which other nations ran toward liberty."

237 *kingdoms* ABC have: "dismembered them and made out of them kingdoms."

241 *the same* B has: "Usbek to the same."

243 *calculators* ABC have: "the mathematicians."

244 *greatness* ABC omit: "her own greatness."

256 *two thousand* ABC have: "four hundred."

256 *Gemmadi* B has: Gemmadi I, 1720.

258 *skins* ABC have: "in a skin."

260 *Letter CXLIII* The second correction notebook shows that M planned to drop this letter. Finally, however, he only shortened it. (Adam)

261 *morbific cause* B has: "internal cause."

262 *subject* (M) "The author, in the manuscript he confided while alive to the publishers, felt it proper to make some cuts. He did not think he should deprive the reader of them, so they will be found here as notes: 'There are many things I don't understand but you, who are a doctor, should understand the language of your colleagues.' " Cut by Barckhausen in accordance with notebook of 1754.

263 *to sell* In M's second notebook, he cast this sentence: "Wouldn't you have in your shop one of those books that I used to buy from you for an old aunt."

264 *happened* ABC carry here the original, jovial text, which M suppressed before the edition of 1758. D carries it as a note. (M) "See the note on preceding page." See Appendix (pp. 294-6) for continuation of text.

264 *Letter CXLIV* This letter missing in AB; first appears in Supplement of C.

264 *Letter CXLV* This letter appears in BCD. Barckhausen relegated it to his Appendix because the last manuscript notebooks of M did not include it.

265 *of it* B has: "I never think of those wretched people. . . ."

267 *testimony* B adds: "But what shall I say of this century, in which I see a scholar at the mercy of a publisher? In which I see a man who would deserve statues forced to give over his

labors to the fortune of a miserable artist? His works would have been useful to posterity but they are overhurried by avarice, and the end is sacrificed completely to the means." Carcassonne has "*statuts*" here instead of "*statues.*"

268 *Shahban, 1720* B has: "the 10th of the Moon of Zilcade, 1715."

268 *violate* ABC add: "violate on every occasion throughout their lives."

269 *Ramadan, 1720* B has: "the Moon of Gemmadi I, 1720."

272 *I know* ABC have: "I don't know."

277 *Letter CLVII* This letter is missing in AB; it first appears in Supplement of C.

277 *Letter CLVIII* Missing in AB, this letter first appears in Supplement of C.

278 *Zelis* ABC have: "Zachi."

279 *Letter CLX* Missing in AB, this letter first appears in Supplement of C.

281 *Appendix* In the following letters and fragments, the first number given corresponds to the number used by Barckhausen in his organization of material found at La Brède; the second indication refers to the number given to the manuscript volume by M and to the sheet or page number therein.

281 *Letters* The following two fragments are drafts of apologies for the *PL* found at La Brède.

290 *country* Fragment published by Barckhausen, taken from autograph at La Brède.

291 *Jaron* Next two paragraphs same as above.

291 *In the matter* Same as above.

292 *The desire* This paragraph same as above.

292 *There are* Same as above.

292 *That man* Same as above.

292 *There is* This letter was found at La Brède in May 1950, by M. Louis Desgraves, head librarian of the city of Bordeaux. It was published, with commentary, by André Masson in *Mercure de France,* Jan. 1, 1954. A partial draft is to be found in *Pensées, NRF,* I, p. 1079. (1603, II, fo. 458). Details as to variant readings can be found in Adam, p. 422.

293 *It is* This letter was originally published by Barckhausen in his edition of the *Pensées,* I, p. 111 (*NRF,* I, p. 1046). Adam produces good reasons (p. 424) for considering it a fragment of the *PL.*

294 *Letter CXLIII* This is the humorous conclusion that was suppressed by M.

295 *Horse Farcy* Caillois prints here "*cheveux*" instead of "*chevaux.*"

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